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The Drama of Race: Contemporary Afro-German Theater

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THE DRAMA OF RACE: CONTEMPORARY AFRO-GERMAN THEATER

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

For Kennedy.

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ABSTRACT

THE DRAMA OF RACE: CONTEMPORARY AFRO-GERMAN THEATER

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The first investigation of Afro-German theater, "The Drama of Race," argues that Afro-German theater empowers as Black actors take ownership of a German stage, a white German space. My dissertation highlights four crucial Afro-German plays: *real life: Germany* (2008), *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* [Home, bittersweet Home] (2010), *Also by Mail* (2013), and *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* [Corn in Germany and Other Galaxies] (2015). In Chapter I, I discuss the cultural conditions in which Afro-German theater emerged—after an established literary corpus by Afro-German authors. Chapter II introduces the first Afro-German play and its improvisational methods as empowering for the teenage actors instead of an audience. I analyze the usage of Augusto Boal's educational theater and the inclusion of African diasporic authors like bell hooks and Sojourner Truth. My analysis in Chapter III builds on the usage of "diasporic iconography" (Jacqueline Nassy Brown) to describe the *Alltag* [daily life] of many Black people in Germany and redefine traditional notions of *Heimat* [home]. Chapter IV reflects on a two-act family drama that utilizes the African diaspora to make allusions to literature, politics, and mythology. Chapter V examines a mother-son relationship. East Germany imprisons the mother who desires individuality in the communist state, and the Afro-East German son

fails to establish meaningful relationships but is able to reconcile the mother-son relationship in outer space. Afro-German theater forges connections across boundaries to the diaspora, pushes national boundaries to put them into question, and creates a space for Black Germans in German society.

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CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE

A. Introduction

The emerging genre of Black German theater thematizes Black German[1] identity on stage and empowers Black Germans through the use of intertextuality and other references to the African diaspora. Since 2008, a dozen or so plays have been performed on German stages. All of the plays, in one way or another, incorporate the knowledge of everyday racism into their scripts, experienced by the actors as scenes of microagression on stage. Through performing microaggressions on-stage, the actors are able to reclaim their experiences by reenacting them; this reenactment plays a secondary role as well, in that it forces audiences to witness these moments. Black audience members will see validation in racist experiences while non-Black audience members witness moments they may have been complicit in.

For the purpose of my work, I define Black German theater as theater which is written, produced, and performed by Black German actors. Importantly, Black German theater is a new theater genre in Germany. While Black German actors had been performing on stage for decades, they had not staged their own productions until recently. However, all of that changed in 2008 with the performances of three plays— *Kosmos*

[1] In my dissertation, I use the terms Black Germans and Afro-German interchangeably. Black/Afro-German identities are self-defining and self-prescribed. When *Farbe bekennen* (Showing Our Colors) was published, the term for Afro-German described only those with a white German parent. Since then, the community in Germany has become much more inclusive. The term Afro-German can be limiting to those who call Germany their home; therefore, the term Black German describes those who live or grew up in Germany and may (or may not) have a German passport, recognizing that passport designation depends more on political circumstances and not one's personal choice.

BRD; *real life: Deutschland*; *Homestory Deutschland*[2]— and the creation of the group LiberatioNoir (which evolved into Label Noir). Over the last decade, Black Germans have thus created a space for themselves to write and tell their own stories on stage. The genre of Black German theater has now begun to blossom into works encompassing a wide range of subject matters and styles. Through their work, Black actors and playwrights are establishing a foundational Black German drama and collaborative work mode. My project is indebted to Julia Wissert, Vanessa Plumly, and Tanya Meyer, who have researched Black German theater from different perspectives. Reflecting the relative newness of the genre, to date no one has researched and focused a project solely on Black German theater. In this dissertation I maintain that Black German theater gives a space for Afro-German identities to be expressed using realia[3] of the African Diaspora. Through self-representation and intertextuality, the plays also address themes of the Diaspora.

Black German theater practitioners are eager to express themselves and their work deliberately. Through their work, Black German theater establishes a foundation of plays that seek to create a space of empowerment and offer multiple stories of Black Germans. The stories Black German theater tells are full of hope for the future. Along with this hope, Black German theater also exposes German racism and simultaneously affirms the experiences of Black Germans. Black German theater realigns power by sharing the experiences of Black Germans, who are acting the roles themselves, while also simultaneously creating a space for Black Germans in the larger African Diaspora. On

[2] I refer to the play separate from the exhibit here.

[3] I use 'realia' to define the various materials of everyday life.

stage, the actors suggest change and envision it happening, all while working collaboratively, be it with other actors or the audience.

As we know, there is no singular way to represent identity. The theater is therefore perfect for representation of Black German identities because it offers a kaleidoscopic spectrum of Black German identities. It is important to value the variety of expressions of Black German theater, although it is an under-researched genre. Black German theater could be viewed in a reductive way with a singular, stereotypical notion of Black identity. In contrast, I understand Black German theater to be kaleidoscopic because it takes bits and pieces of other diasporic literature and media to create new and innovative stories. These kaleidoscopic identities are important because Black Germans have not yet been represented in this way. Taking bits and pieces from elsewhere, actors create their own pictures. These pictures are familiar, but unique within its new setting. With this interest in showcasing these kaleidoscopic viewpoints, I reject traditional scholarship that is interested in creating linear narratives or drawing teleological conclusions.[4] I refute a linear progressive model of analysis. It is reductive and rooted in white normative notions of progress. While I could follow this model, I choose to take a step back and be more inclusive (rather than stick to an analysis that routinely rejects women, People of Color, and queer identities). By doing so, I embrace the diversity and complexity of my project, showing how variegated Black German identities and, likewise, Black German theater, truly are.

[4] For a critique of linear narratives of analysis, see Michelle Wright's introduction to *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1-36.

In keeping with the nature of a kaleidoscope, Black German theater is not one thing; it is not easily definable. Instead, Black German plays are: five-act plays, two-act plays, improvised plays performed by professional actors, non-professionals, and children. There is also variety in the themes the plays address: being Black German in the classroom, taking public transportation, living with a mentally unstable mother, and traveling to the funeral of the father you didn't get to know. The setting of the plays is also varied: taking place in outer space, Nigeria, Germany, on the playground, at a bus stop, at home, and on a train. My contribution to the field is not only an analysis of a new art form, but also an investigation of the complexities of Black German theater which argues that this genre is sophisticated and worthy of scholarly discussion.

The four plays I will examine here address the politics of Black identities on stage. Afro-Germans engage with themes and topics not seen on any other stage in Germany. The plays feature Afro-Germans as main characters on stage, which itself is a political move. The theater is a public space and the actors claim the stage as a Black space. In doing so, the actors occupy a position of power and express their experiences and various identities for themselves, instead of through a white mediator. Further, the Afro-German authors and dramaturgs write experiences and feelings as Black people in Germany, instead of as problematic experiences imagined by a white German author or actor.

Organized chronologically, my dissertation emphasizes a critique of race and gender, as addressed by four plays. The storyline of the first play reflects youth experiences and larger community issues. Historically, the Black German community needed to address community issues before concentrating on individual articulations of

Black identity. Performing this type of theater forges connections vis-à-vis various constraints: financial, age, access to theaters, the nation, and even the boundaries of planet Earth. Because of the themes that Afro-German plays addresses, not every theater is open to hosting the plays. Black German theater tends to not take place in government-funded theater houses, but instead in independent theaters and cultural centers. The lack of funding also creates financial difficulties. Groups like Label Noir refuse to apply for funding that is earmarked for migrant theater because the Black German actors included in the dissertation do not consider themselves as migrants.

The actors in the first play were children and young adults; their age limited their experiences, so that play's themes focused on the playground, classroom, and nightclub. In addition, these themes extend beyond the nation and reach outside of Germany; they make connections beyond Germany's boundaries in order to create and/or find a space welcoming of Black German identities. While the first play focuses on places within the nation, in Chapter IV, *Also by Mail* takes readers outside of the nation to Nigeria, and the last play takes place outside of Earth, in outer space.

Due to national and local impediments, the Black German theater community is very small. The small size allows for a dialogic mode of exchange between actors and plays, with ideas moving reciprocally back and forth. As the actors (like Jonathan Aikens and Dela Dabulamanzi) perform in multiple plays, they bring their experience to different roles and characters from previous plays, so that these plays are inherently in conversation with each other. Furthermore, because the actors know each other and have worked with one another, they attend each other's plays. The small community is beneficial, allowing for exchange on an individual level.

B. Black German Theater

1. Missing from German Theater

Black German theater makes an intervention into how Black people are represented on stage. Black Germans are responsible for producing, writing, directing and acting in performances. The roles reflect self-representation, instead of Black identity imagined by white playwrights. Black German theater also makes an intervention through the historic representation of Black people on stage. Black Germans struggle to find roles due to racist casting practices. Blackfacing was (and continues to be) yet another aspect which makes it difficult for Black German actors to find work.[5] Directors would rather hire white actors to blackface these roles, claiming that they either could not find a suitable Black actor or that they refuse to cast a Black actor unless the race of the character is explicit.[6] Blackface affirms and re-affirms the spectacle of blackface as an acceptable form of entertainment. A performance in blackface also reaffirms the image of Black people as parody and constantly negates their abilities, presence, and realities. This is not a trivial matter limited only to the theatrical margins; instead, it amounts to an erasure of Afro-German agency both in the performance space and, analogously, in

[5] For more information on this, see Arte video, "Label Noir auf Arte," uploaded March 14, 2014, http://youtu.be/GNTLnwivIrU and also Katrin Sieg, "Race, Guilt and Innocence: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater," *German Studies Review* 38, no.1 (2015): 117-134.

[6] Nele Obermueller, "Does German Theater Have a Race Problem?" *Exberliner*, May 30, 2012, http://www.exberliner.com/culture/stage/does-german-theatre-have-a-race-problem/.

society, as theatrical space is representative of social space.[7] With respect to this process, these theatrical bodies also re-produce or enforce racial identities. Performance theorist Henry Elam Jr. draws attention to the power of blackface in reinforcing "black inferiority in the white imaginary."[8] In his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall calls identity a "production." It is never done and completed, "but instead always in process, and always constituted with, not outside representation."[9] The refusal to give roles to Black actors only perpetuates the idea that Black actors are not as talented and therefore less than their white counterparts. Further, the refusal also perpetuates the idea that German identity is equivalent with whiteness.

2. Black Germans in History

Afro-Germans are not a migrant population. The dominant migrant narratives in Germany began in the 1960s with the need for skilled workers. Instead, the history of Black people in Germany began much earlier. The following is a brief overview. There is evidence of Black people in Germany during the Middle Ages.[10] Black court subjects, so

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[7] Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theater: Using Performance to Make Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 67.

[8] Henry Elam Jr, "Reality ✓," *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 173-90. Elam discusses the history of American slavery and minstrelsy here, but this is still relevant in the German context. Although the blackface figures are not smiling and dancing, they are always marked as foreign (African or American) and always unequal to white performers on stage.

[9] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart: 1990), 222.

[10] Paul Kaplan, "The Calenberg Altarpiece: Black African Christian in Renaissance Germany," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora Points of Contact, 1250-1914*, ed. Misha Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 21.

called *Hofmohren*, served in the military, in manufacturing, as bodyguards, musicians, and attendants.[11] Depictions of African-descended people in both art and literature also exist, such as St. Maurice.[12] There is also evidence of Black people in Germany in art and court documents during the Baroque era (circa 1660- 1725). Afro-Germans today trace their history back to Wilhelm Anton Amo. He earned his law degree and doctorate after studying at universities at Halle, Wittenberg, and Jena. He then returned to Ghana due to the intense racism he encountered in Germany.[13]

The Germans gained their colonies at the Berlin Congress in 1884, spearheaded by Otto von Bismarck. German gained East Africa (present-day Tanzania, including parts of Rwanda and Burundi), Southwest Africa (Namibia), Togoland (Togo), and Cameroon.[14] Wealthy Cameroonians sent their children to Germany for education or apprenticeships. However, Germans lost control over the program and initiated travel bans as World War I began.[15] Most of the Cameroonians in Germany stayed there after

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[11] Rashid-S. Pegah, "Real and Imagined Africans in Baroque Court Divertissements," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora Points of Contact, 1250-1914*, ed. Misha Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 74-75.

[12] Asoka Esuruoso and Philipp Khabo Köpsell, "A Historical Overview," *Arriving in the Future: Stories of Home and Exile* (Berlin: Epubli, 2014), 18.

[13] May Ayim, "Im Mittelalter 'Mohren' und weiße Christen," in *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, ed. Katharina Ognuntoye, May Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz (Berlin: Orlanda, 1986), 18.

[14] Ayim, "Die Deutschen in den Kolonien," in *Farbe bekennen*, 30-31.

[15] Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, "Practising Diaspora Politics 1918-1933," in *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 225.

World War I[16] and eventually died there.[17] Before 1918, Cameroonians considered themselves "not as subjects but as partners of the German imperial power."[18] The majority of Cameroonians who stayed in Germany married white German women and had German children.[19] Germany finally lost all of its colonies in the peace treaty that ended World War I.

After the loss of World War I, Black soldiers from French colonies occupied the Rhineland region. These soldiers then had relationships with local German women; the birth of children was politicized and regarded as a visible sign of a violent attack on white German femininity.[20] Afro-Germans lived through the Third Reich, including editor Hans Massaquoi and singer and actress Marie Nejar. The film *Black Survivors of the Holocaust* (1997) features interviews of Black Germans during the Third Reich, including Hans Hauck, Werner Eugoime, and Theodor Michael. The time period between World War I and World War II has been researched in detail by scholars Tina Campt, Yara-Colette Lemke-Muniz de Faria, and Heide Fehrenbach. Their research has recovered previous racist scholarship by Peter Martin and Rainer Pommerin, just to name a few.

After the Germans lost World War II, Germany was occupied by Allied troops. The United States and France (through its colonies) brought in Black soldiers, which

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[16] Aitken and Rosenhaft, "Surviving in Germany: Work, Welfare, and Community," in *Black Germany*, 119.

[17] Aitken and Rosenhaft, "Practising Diaspora Politics," 226.

[18] Ibid., 195

[19] Aitken and Rosenhaft, "Settling Down: Marriage and Family," in *Black Germany*, 88.

[20] Ayim, "Schutz der Familie und Zwangssterilisation," in *Farbe bekennen*, 53.

resulted in relationships forming between Black men and white German women. The derogatory terms "brown baby" or "occupation baby" emerged as a way to demean the children from and women in these relationships. Some of these children were adopted by foreign families.[21] The children of Black occupation soldiers were stereotyped as invaders, as the reminder of occupation of Germany and loss of World War I, and the mothers were judged for their unions with soldiers as well. Many of the children born from Black soldiers were sent to orphanages, due to financial circumstances or pressure from social services. The long, extensive history of Afro-Germans in Germany shows how very different their multiple stories are compared to these of other minorities living in Germany today. Further, this history illustrates why Afro-German theater practitioners reject funding for migrant sources, thought would place them outside the nation or that would essentially rewrite their history in Germany.[22]

3. Afro-German Theater Roots Are in Black German Literature

The plays featured in my dissertation evolved from a movement of increasing Black German self-expression. In recent decades, Black Germans have expressed themselves through poetry, film, historical studies, and autobiography. In this section, I will give a brief description of the early works of Black Germans, particularly showing how the African Diaspora has been relevant for Black German writing. There are a few

[21] Ibid., 87.

[22] For an expanded history of Afro-Germans, see Asoka Esuruoso's "A Historical Overview" and Philipp Khabo Köpsell's "Literature and Activism," in *Arriving in the Future*, 14-35 and 36-47.

early examples of publications by Black people in Germany before the mid-1980s.[23] These are few and far between. Starting in the 1960s, however, Black authors in Germany began publishing their work. The African Writers' Association published literary and cultural magazines: *The African Interpreter*, in Cologne in the 1970s, and *Béto* and *AWA Finnaba* in West Berlin in the 1980s.[24] Cameroonian student Dualla Misipo wrote a novel, *Der Junge aus Duala: Ein Regierungsschüler erzählt* (1973), in German.[25] The plays of Cameroonian Alexandre Kum'a Ndumbe III include: *Ach, Kamerun! Unsere alte deutsche Kolone. Ein Dokumentarstück*; *Kafra-Biatanga-Tragödie Afrikas: Ein Stück in elf Szenen*; *Lumumba II*; and *Das Fest der Liebe - Die Chance der Jugend*. The Afro-German artist and poet El Loko published two volumes of poetry, *Geist und Freiheit* (1981), and *Mawuena* (1983), and an autobiography *Der Blues in mir* (1986). Guy St. Louis and Raja Lubinetzki published their poetry in *Gedichte einer schönen Frau* (1983) and *Magie* (1985).[26]

[23] Early Afro-German literature exists but has not been widely distributed. The magazine *The Negro Worker* was published in 1931 by the International Trade Union Committee. It was a transnational communist Black magazine in Hamburg featuring articles from South Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and West Africa. More information on early literature can be found in *Arriving in the Future*.

[24] Köpsell, "Literature and Activism," *Arriving in the Future*, 41.

[25] For more information on letters written by Cameroonians to the German government so that they could legally stay in Germany, see Aitken's and Rosenhaft's *Black Germany*.

[26] Aitken and Rosenhaft, "Should I Stay and Can I Go?" *Black Germany*, 43.

The groundbreaking volume *Farbe bekennen* appeared in 1986, edited by May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz.[27] This volume is a collection of poems, history, interviews, autobiographies, and pictures of West German women of African descent. Through the autobiographies, Afro-Germans shared their childhood experiences in Germany and responded to important moments in German history. The collection also features a history of the representation of Black people in Germany;[28] the Rhineland children and colonial legacies in Germany between the wars;[29] the many children born to white German mothers and Black soldiers from the United States, France, the Caribbean, or Algeria;[30] and the racism found in German children's songs, coloring books, songs and cartoons.[31] With this volume, Afro-Germans declared their German identity and their attempts to reach out to others and explained why it was so hard to grow up Black in Germany. With clarity and transparency, this book chronicles Afro-German history. At the same time, the collection shows happy, smiling Afro-German women, as opposed to the problematic images Germans had seen up until that point.

There are also several Afro-German poetry collections. Like *Farbe bekennen*, the collection *Entfernte Verbindungen* was published by Orlanda Verlag in 1993, containing

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[27] The last two chapters list May Ayim as author, but the author(s) of the previous texts are unclear. One can surmise that she had studied at the University of Regensburg and included research from her thesis and that the other articles were collaborations.

[28] For more information, see sections "Vorkoloniales Afrikabild, Kolonialismus, Faschismus" and "Die Deutschen in den Kolonien," in *Farbe bekennen*, 17-28 and 29-33.

[29] See the chapter "Afrikanerinnen und Afro-Deutsche in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus," in *Farbe bekennen,* 45-64.

[30] See "Afro-Deutsche nach 1945--Die sogenannten 'Besatzungskinder,'" in *Farbe bekennen,* 85-102.

[31] For more information see "Rassismus hier und heute," in *Farbe bekennen,* 127-144.

poetry as well as essays. A shorter collection, *Macht der Nacht: Eine schwarze deutsche Anthologie*, was published in 1992. May Ayim's influential poetry collection *Blues in schwarz weiß* came out in 1995, and the poetry collection *Talking Home* was published in 1999; published in the Netherlands, it includes poetry in a variety of languages: German, English, Spanish, and Turkish.

Autobiography was and continues to be a medium through which Afro-Germans share their experiences.[32] Ika Hügel-Marshall published her autobiography *Invisible*

[32] For autobiographies of Black Germans born prior to 1945, see, for example, Hans J. Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: Morrow, 1999); Theodor Wonja Michael, *Deutsch sein und schwarz dazu: Erinnerungen eines Afro-Deutschen* (Munich: dtv, 2013); Marie Nejar, *Mach nicht so traurige Augen, weil du ein Negerlein bist: Meine Jugend im Dritten Reich* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2007); Gert Schramm, *Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann: Mein Leben in Deutschland* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011). For autobiographies of Black West Germans—many of whom are sport, music, or entertainment celebrities—see, for example, Kevin-Prince Boateng, *Ich, Prince Boateng: Mein Leben. Mein Spiel. Meine Abrechnung*. (Kulmbach: Plassen, 2015); Harald Gerunde, *Eine von uns: Als Schwarze in Deutschland geboren* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 2000) (though written by her white German husband, this biography of Bärbel Kampmann was authorized by her and is therefore mentioned here); Jimmy Hartwig, *"Ich möcht' noch so viel tun . . .": Meine Kindheit, meine Karriere, meine Krankheit* (Bergisch-Gladbach: Bastei Lübbe, 1994); Ika Hügel-Marshall, *Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1998); Charles M. Huber, *Ein Niederbayer im Senegal: Mein Leben zwischen zwei Welten* (Frankfurt/M: Scherz, 2004); Steffi Jones, *Der Kick des Lebens: Wie ich den Weg nach oben schaffte* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 2007); Günther Kaufmann, *Der weiße Neger vom Hagenbergl* (Munich: Diana, 2004); Samy Deluxe, *Dis wo ich herkomm: Deutschland Deluxe* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009); Mark Medlock, *Ehrlich* (Munich: pendo, 2007); Thomas Usleber, *Die Farben unter meiner Haut: Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen* (Frankfurt/M: Brandes & Apsel, 2002). For autobiographies of Black East Germans, see, for example, André Baganz, *Lebenslänglich Bautzen II: Als Farbiger in der DDR* (Berlin: Westkreuz, 1993), revised edition published as *Endstation Bautzen II: Zehn Jahre lebenslänglich* (Halle [Saale]: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2010); ManuEla Ritz, *Die Farbe meiner Haut: Die Antirassismustrainerin erzählt* (Freiburg: Herder, 2009); Detlef D! Soost, *Heimkind – Neger – Pionier: Mein Leben* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Wunderlich, 2005); Abini Zöllner, *Schokoladenkind: Meine Familie und andere Wunder* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003). Nicola Lauré Al-Samarai compiled this listing in "Inspirited Topography: Haunting Survivals and the Location of Experience in Black German Traditions of Knowledge and Culture," in *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives*

Woman in 1998. Hans Massaquoi's autobiography *Destined to Witness*, written in English, debuted a year later. Civil servant Thomas Usleber published his short autobiography with a smaller press (so it is not as widely distributed as the others), *Die Farben unter meiner Haut* (2002). Former actor and current politician Charles Huber also wrote an autobiography, entitled *Ein Niederbayer in Senegal* (2004). Famous singer Marie Nejar wrote her autobiography, *Mach nicht so traurige Augen, weil du ein Negerlein bist* (2007) with the help of a collaborator. Theater author and director ManuEla Ritz wrote her autobiography, *Die Farbe meiner Haut* (2009). Boxer Charly Graf wrote his autobiography, *Kämpfe für dein Leben*, in 2011. These works are mostly success stories that detail family life, occupations, and the understanding of one's self in a majority white German society.[33]

While autobiography was the beginning of Afro-German literature, Afro-Germans have branched out to other genres of writing. Noah Sow's *Deutschland Schwarz Weiss* (2008) is a book "that challenges accepted paradigms" about blackness in German culture in a very tongue-in-cheek way. The first novella by an Afro-German was *this is not about sadness* by Olumide Popoola (2010). It takes place in England and features a queer Black female protagonist from South Africa. These above books mark the first of many Afro-German texts written in English. Philipp Khabo Köpsell wrote about Black identity in Germany as a piece of spoken word poetry in *Die Akte James Knopf* (2010), and more recently he edited a volume of short stories and poetry by Afro-Germans, entitled

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on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture, edited by Sara Lennox (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Press, 2016), 61-62.

[33] For more on this, see Dirk Göttsche, "Self-Assertion, Intervention and Achievement. Black German Writing in Postcolonial Perspective," *Orbis Litterarum* 67, no. 2 (April 2012): 83-135.

Arriving in the Future (2014). His volume *Afro-Shop* (2014) is a collection of texts and images that can be read individually or together. Michael Götting's novel *Contrapunctus* (2015) features multiple intertwined narratives of Black Germans.

4. Importance of Recovering Black German History

Since the beginnings of Afro-German cultural production, Afro-Germans have chronicled Afro-German history. The absence of Afro-German history in mainstream German history is reflected in authors' emphasis on it in creative texts. Previously ignored or forgotten, Afro-German history is considered by mainstream historians and a broader white German public to be a recent phenomenon, something that happened to Germany as a "punishment" for losing two wars. However, as Afro-German activists and scholars have shown, and as demonstrated in the history section above, Afro-German history began early, and it is varied. There are many historical reasons for the Black presence in Germany, which resulted in Afro-German children. The lack of a single Afro-German story makes matters more complicated for audiences, but it is important to return to the idea that Afro-Germans aren't considered special cases, exceptions, or isolated. In order for Afro-Germans to write creative literature, they thus also had to write their history into existence.

Certain works by Afro-Germans detail the histories of Afro-Germans and Black people in Germany. One of the editors of *Farbe bekennen*, Katharina Oguntoye, went on to publish her thesis at the Technische Universität under the title *Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von*

1884 bis 1950 (1997).[34] It is a historical work that considers life in Germany, political activity, Africans in German movies, and circumstances regarding leaving and entering Germany, among other issues. More recently, Fatima El-Tayeb wrote *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um "Rasse" und Identität 1890-1933* (2001),[35] which examines scientific racism and Reichstag debates on intermarriage and Afro-German children in the colonies.

The short story and poetry collection *Arriving in the Future* (2014), edited by Asoka Esuruoso and Philipp Khabo Köpsell, begins with a twenty-one page historical overview and then a literature overview. This is striking because the history is presented as background information that is important to understanding creative Afro-German expression. The fact that works by Black Germans continue to reprint history suggests that the book's editors believe that information and/or the history of Black people in Germany is not accessible to newer audiences. In addition, *Arriving in the Future* (2014) adds to history previously unknown by directing attention to the books written before 1986 to show that there is a longer history of Black publication in Germany that should be recognized. This additional information helps position contemporary texts in a new light; the texts can be read together, or as complementary instead of alone. Without scholars working on these themes, this type of archival information would remain unknown. The editors of this collection gather information through the community of

[34] Katharina Oguntoye, *Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte*: *Zur Lebenssituation von Africanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von 1884 bis 1950* (Berlin: Hoho-Verl. Hoffmann, 1997).

[35] Fatima El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche: der Diskurs um "Rasse" und nationale Identität 1890-1933* (New York: Campus, 2001).

academics and also through the community of Afro-Germans who have published works that have not received the same level of acclaim as *Farbe bekennen*.

5. The Role of Identity

Identity is another theme addressed in these works. In the earlier works like *Farbe bekennen* and *Daheim unterwegs*, Afro-Germans challenged racism by asserting their German heritage. *Farbe bekennen* brought attention to implicit racism in German children's books and songs, thereby implicating German society in the way it constructs Black people. Hügel-Marshall's autobiography, *Daheim unterwegs*, is named after a May Ayim poem and is about being at home in transit, instead of in a city or country. Hügel-Marshall writes about her identity as a Black child in rural Bavaria, then later as an adult about her time with Audre Lorde. Scholar Dirk Göttsche describes early Afro-German writing like Hügel-Marshall's as "Challenging exclusion and both open and residual racism, coming to terms with traumatizing experiences of othering," that is, of being treated as not a native German due to skin color.[36]

In some Afro-German autobiographies, race is absent and instead class is emphasized. (Particularly, I am thinking of Graf, Usleber, Zöllner, and Huber). These authors do not recognize institutional racism around them. There is a shift in tone and self-understanding, but we also see this change with Usleber and Nejar's autobiographies, in different generations. It is unclear how much (or little) control these authors have over the final product, since they are written with ghostwriters, collaborators, and/or larger presses. These autobiographies feature opposing viewpoints to the others discussed above.

[36] Göttsche, 83.

While including themselves in the German nation by writing their stories--"claim[ing] an equal place in contemporary German society"[37]--Afro-Germans also connect to the African diaspora through what Michelle Wright calls "perform[ing] the diaspora."[38] In *Blues in schwarz weiß*, for example, Ayim connects to the African diaspora through use of Adinka symbols in her poetry.[39] Connections to the diaspora occur on a personal level as well. Just as Hügel-Marshall was encouraged by author Audre Lorde, the author of *Roots* (1976), Alex Haley, encouraged Massaquoi to share his story. His story details the reconciliation of his German identity and his Black identity under National Socialism, when he desired to be a Hitler Youth like his classmates but also cheered on Jesse Owens during the 1936 Olympics. The autobiographies of Massaquoi and Hügel-Marshall show their difficulties with the local community, but also the ability to connect to others in the diaspora.

Feminism was also essential to Afro-German cultural production. Audre Lorde was important to the development of the book *Farbe bekennen*. In fact, May Ayim met the publisher of Orlanda Verlag, Dagmar Schultz, at a feminist conference.[40] Founded in part by queer women, the Black German movement challenged heteropatriarchy from the

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Michelle Wright, "In a Nation or in a Diaspora?: Gender, Sexuality, and Afro-German Subject Formation," in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers Between African America and Germany*, ed. Maria Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 196.

[39] Ayim touches on themes of family, love, friendship, as well as German national identity during the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

[40] Jamele Watkins, interview with Dagmar Schultz, October 11, 2012.

outset.[41] Women have played a huge role in the public eye of the Black German movement, making the movement intersectional from its inception.[42] Feminist connections have continued to be important for the Black German movement. May Ayim was one of the co-founders of the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche in 1985,[43] and Afro-Deutsche Frauen, or ADEFRA, was also created around the same time, with inspiration from Lorde.[44]

Lorde's ideas are rooted in African American feminism. Diasporic connections for Afro-Germans have been vital to the growth and development of the Black German community. In 1999, editors Olumide Popoola and Beldan Sezen published a poetry collection entitled *Talking Home--Heimat aus unserer eigenen Feder, Frauen of Color in Deutschland.* The poetry and short story collection also addresses sexual identity, which was not addressed in earlier Afro-German texts. The editors list authors who are women of Color as inspiration (e.g. Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Sonia Sanchez, Silva Makeda, Amy Tan, June Jordan and Kitty Tsui). The editors include May Ayim's poem "Forward"

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[41] Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others*: *Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 67.

[42] For early writings on intersectionality, see Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman* (New York: New American Library, 1970), and Frances Beal's essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), reprinted in *Meridians* 8, no. 2 (2008): 166-176. Both texts predate Kimberlé Crenshaw's article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1992):1241-99. Other scholars cite the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement (1977)," in *Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson, 63-70. For most recent scholarship on the term, see Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2016).

[43] May Ayim and John Amoateng-Kantara, "Wir wollen aus die Isolation hinaus," *Grenzenlos und unverschämt* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1997), 45-50.

[44] ADEFRA, "Homepage," last modified December 2016, http://www.adefra.com.

in the introduction to the book. Ayim's influence on this poetry collection appears in individual poems as well as in the blue cover recalling her book *Blues in schwarz weiß*. Further, the editors assert that Queer Women of Color have a story with, around, and in Germany. In this sense, they are making efforts to be both deliberately seen and non-mainstream. As a result, editors of the collection *Talking Home* struggled to find a publisher in Germany. Black German authors in general have also had difficulty with the publishing industry.[45] Indeed, the origin of the Black German movement in feminism is relevant because it meant that the earlier books were published by the feminist publishing house Orlanda.

6. Black German Plays

Featured in the plays in various ways, Black German literature nevertheless laid the foundation for Black German theater. Theater offers more control for an artist in a way that published literature does not. Afro-Germans started writing and performing in their own plays in 2008. Since 2012, even more plays have featured Black Germans, including *Homestory Deutschland* (2008), *Kosmos BRD* (2008), *real life: Deutschland* (2008), *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* (2010), *Der kleine Bruder des Ruderers* (2010), *Satoe-gesegnete Heimat* (2011), *Echter Berliner!!! Ihr nicht, Fuck you!* (2013), *Also by Mail* (2013), *Schwarz tragen* (2013), *Kosmos BRD* (2014), *Black Bismark* (2014), *Schwarz gemacht* (2014), *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* (2015), *Jung giftig und schwarz* (2015), and *First Black Woman in Space* (2016). I will focus the dissertation on the following four plays written by and starring Black Germans: *real life: Deutschland; Heimat, bittersüße Heimat; Also by Mail;* and *Mais in Deutschland und anderen*

[45] For example, Michael Götting has had trouble publishing his work since 1985. For more information, see Philipp Khabo Köpsell, *Arriving in the Future*.

Galaxien. Many of the same actors participate in performances of the different plays, including Afro-German actors Lara Milagro, Leander Graf, Dela Debulamanzi, Jonathan Aikens, and Moses Leo.

Although the plays are very different in terms of style, they all thematize identity in their critique of racism and microaggressions in German society.[46] These plays work at the intersection of race, gender, language, and nation; their performance examines the ways race and gender impact the daily experiences of Black Germans. Instead of treating race alone, they also look at gender to critique layers of racism. The plays achieve this critique through their use of intertextuality and engage with the identity, language, and culture of the African diaspora.

C. Diaspora

There is a tendency to conflate diasporic identity with the United States, slavery, and the Middle Passage because US scholarship in Diaspora Studies focuses primarily on the American context. Michelle Wright, in her article "Black in Time: Exploring New Ontologies, New Dimensions, New Epistemologies of the African Diaspora," urges scholars to locate Afro-German identity in different "spacetimes," to decenter dominant diasporic narratives, especially African-American diasporic narratives.[47] Wright concludes Afro-Germans are "Outsiders from Within-from-Without." While part of the German community, they are treated as foreign (African or African American). This means their biographies and experiences in Germany, although documented, are not

[46] Microaggressions will be discussed more fully below.

[47] Michelle M. Wright, "Black in Time: Exploring New Ontologies, New Dimensions, New Epistemologies of the African Diaspora," *Transforming Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (2010): 70.

accepted as legitimately German by mainstream white German society. Afro-Germans are then treated as foreign, although for many, it is the only nation and heritage they know.

In her most recent book, *Physics of Blackness*, Michelle Wright criticizes Diaspora theory while also offering a better model to examine Diasporic identities. She decenters the Americas and discusses differences in Black identity in a global perspective. Her framework outside of a US context is useful for me because my plays feature an expression of a different kind of Blackness. She explains, "For those of us who work in Black studies on identity, we are almost wearily familiar with this problem of trying to find a one-size-fits-all definition of Blackness."[48] Wright thus criticizes scholars' notions of Blackness as a 'what,' and calls for Blackness to be a 'when' and 'where,' and she calls for a break from a narrative of linear progress.[49] Her situated Blackness, which she calls "phenomenological,"[50] allows me to analyze Blackness in Germany, as linear timelines are exclusionary and leave Afro-German lives out of scholarship.

Wright's theories open gaps in understanding other types of Black identity and show the limitations in trying to use one framework to do so. Wright explains: "Many Blacknesses appear, but they are not easily represented on any of the linear timelines that define the Black collective, including the most frequently discussed, published, and

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[48] Michelle Wright, "Introduction," *Physics of Blackness*: *Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 2.

[49] Ibid., 3.

[50] Ibid., 4.

assumed epistemology: Middle Passage Blackness."[51] These stories are, she argues, exclusionary; Wright argues for a new framework for concepts of Blackness that does not focus on the heteropatriarchal male body and instead allows for marginalized narratives to emerge.[52] She explains:

> In "uncovering" what ultimately drives and defines our concepts of Blackness—space and time—*Physics of Blackne*ss argues that becoming aware of how spacetime operates in our everyday and more formal discourses on identity can help us retrieve those identities that have been consigned to the margins as "rare" and "unique" and bring them into their true place as a site for enriching intersections with other bodies, other times, and other histories.[53]

Instead of reproducing a mode of Blackness that considers everything but the Middle Passage unique, Wright urges scholars not to conflate time and space narratives because they promote a return back to Africa.[54] Instead, Wright argues for openness. She demonstrates that an analysis within the present moment is more productive because it illuminates the intersections of Blackness instead of pointing to a teleological narrative.[55] Wright argues that Black identity should be examined as an opening rather than conflated. The intersection of race "now" is important in thinking through how intertextuality and diasporic iconography play a role in the plays.

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[51] Ibid., 12.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 35.

[54] Ibid., 83.

[55] Ibid., 111.

1. Afro-Germans within the African Diaspora

Afro-Germans present an interesting dynamic in the African Diaspora. Historian Tina Campt and Michelle M. Wright are part of the early canon of theorizing Afro-German identities. In her article, "Afro-German Cultural Identity," Campt elucidates, "Afro-Germans have no popularly acknowledged or recognized place in German history, few role models of African or Afro-European descent, and until recently, no real sense of themselves as a community."[56] The Afro-German community on a national level is quite young, existing as a politically organized community only since the eighties. However, there were some earlier isolated meetings on a local level in some communities.[57] Organizers of the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (then Initiative Schwarze Deutsche) met in Berlin. Living in a white society as an Afro-German can be isolating. Co-founder of ISD John Amoteng-Kantara explains: "Als Gruppe können wir dem Rassimus viel besser entgegentreten und uns schützen" [As a group, we could combat racism much better and protect each other].[58] Being a community is helpful for the group organizers twofold: firstly, community works to better combat racism, and, additionally, community protects its members. In their work, members of this community also sought to rewrite the overlooked Afro-German history.[59] Because Afro-Germans have been written out of history, they do not exist in mainstream awareness outside entertainment.

[56] Tina Campt. "Afro-German Cultural Identity and the Politics of Positionality: Contests and Contexts in the Formation of a German Ethnic Identity," *New German Critique* 58 (1993): 112.

[57] Tiffany Florvil, Black German Studies Seminar, Conference of the German Studies Association, Kansas City, MO, September 21, 2014.

[58] Ayim and Amoateng-Kantara, 45.

[59] Ibid., 47.

Campt explains that Black identity exists for many outside German society, making Afro-Germans considered foreign in their own country.[60] Wright has also commented on the insider and outsider status Afro-Germans face. In her article, "Others-From-Within-From-Without," she asks the question, "How does one respond to a discourse that seems incapable of understanding the basic facts of your existence?"[61]

Afro-Germans constantly run into people who ask invasive questions about their family life and backgrounds; the play *real life: Deutschland* shows instances of Afro-German children who deal with those who misunderstand Afro-German identity. Wright explains that Afro-Germans are considered African or African American despite having been born, raised and socialized in German society; German identity is denied to them.[62] This exclusion from the German nation relegates them to what Wright theorizes as inhabiting space both inside and outside the nation, the "Other-from-Within (a member of that country) and an Other-from-Without (misrecognized as an African)."[63] Vanessa Plumly remarks on Campt's work thusly: "Afro-German women's conceptions of their cultural identity reveal the inadequacies of traditional models of cultural and racial identity which posit an either/or choice between opposing categories of cultural or racial

[60] Campt, 113.

[61] Wright, "Others-From-Within-From-Without," *Callaloo* 26, no. 2 (2003), 296.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Wright, "Others-From-Within-From-Without," 297. While Dirk Göttsche believes that this is not the case anymore, I would argue that this still happens and moreover is the experience of some of the YoungStars, who come from all over Germany.

identity."[64] Campt points out that German identity is read as white identity, which makes race and nation one.[65] Therefore, she expounds, these viewpoints—on Afro-Germans as outsiders and German national identity as white—renders Afro-German identity inconceivable.[66] Campt and Wright have thus both shown in their work that Afro-German identity has simply been declared non-existent in German society.

2. Complicated Diasporas

Afro-German experiences have shown how complicated diasporic connections can be. Campt calls us to recognize the difference between diasporic cultures, however, and not assume that all diasporas express diasporic connection the same way.[67] The diasporic culture for Afro-Germans in fact originated with a strained relationship: many Afro-Germans initially distrusted other Black Germans. In an interview in *Farbe bekennen*, May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Laura Baum all agree that they initially viewed other Afro-Germans with distrust. Katharina Oguntoye shares: "In Heidelberg, for a while I constantly used to run into a colored woman with fascinating green eyes. She always kept her distance. I was afraid to initiate an acquaintance with her for fear of competition."[68] Ayim continues to say that she did not want to be friends with other

[64] Campt, 111, and qtd. in Vanessa Plumly, "BLACK-Red-Gold in 'der bunten Republik'" (PhD diss, University of Cincinnati, 2015), 274-75.

[65] Campt, 113.

[66] Campt, 112.

[67] Campt, 111.

[68] May Ayim, Laura Baum, Katharina Oguntoye and Dagmar Schultz, "Three Afro-German women in conversation with Dagmar Schultz," in *Showing Our Colors*, 161-162.

Afro-Germans, let alone other People of Color.[69] As these comments indicate, the community that these Afro-German women desired to be incorporated into was a white German community, not a Black diasporic community. Similar statements can be found in the 2016 book *Spiegelblicke*, which includes short creative contributions from Afro-German authors and artists. Some Afro-Germans know their Black descended relatives, while others do not, which further makes connecting to a Black diasporic community more difficult. Considering Ayim's and Oguntoye's initial response to other Afro-Germans as recorded in *Farbe bekennen* and the theories of Campt and Wright, it is thus important to recognize that the initial Afro-German connection to diasporic communities was complicated. If it happened, it occurred on an individual basis. Instead, connecting to the diaspora was a journey, and this resulted in constant references to the diaspora in creative texts; Afro-Germans initially distanced themselves from the diaspora and other Afro-Germans but eventually created community amongst themselves in an obvious progression.

3. Microaggressions

The plays in my dissertation affirm diasporic connections by including scenes of microaggressions. The shared experience of microaggressions bonds Black people across the globe. Microaggressions subtly indicate that, based on skin color, a person does not belong to a community. In his book *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as: "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights

[69] Ibid.

and insults to the target person or group."[70] This definition is helpful, as it offers a perspective on microaggressions, even when unintentional, as harmful. Showcasing microaggressions on stage is empowering because: "Many Whites . . . fail to realize that people of color from the moment of birth are subjected to multiple racial microaggressions from the media, peers, neighbors, friends, teachers, and even in the education process and/or curriculum itself."[71]

The plays bring up different issues of daily racism because the topic has not been exhausted. People of Color experience the trauma of multiple microaggressions during their entire lives. Afro-Portuguese scholar Grada Kilomba has undertaken case studies in the everyday racism involved when Afro-Germans are treated as strangers or foreigners within their own community. In her book *Plantation Memories*, Kilomba clarifies: "Those who are 'different' remain perpetually incompatible with the nation; they can never actually belong, they are irreconcilably *Ausländer* [foreigners]. The questions 'where do you come from' or 'do you intend to go back' embody exactly this fantasy of incompatibility."[72] Vanessa Plumly explains Kilomba's contribution in her dissertation: "Specifically, Kilomba conveys that Blackness signifies 'being out of place' while whiteness signifies 'being in place'."[73] This aspect of everyday racism appears in all four

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[70] Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 28.

[71] Ibid., 7.

[72] Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories* (Münster: Unrast, 2008), 65.

[73] Kilomba, 30, qtd. in Plumly, 21.

plays considered in this dissertation: *real life: Deutschland*; *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*; *Also by Mail;* and *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien*.

D. Intertextuality and Diaspora

Intertextuality provides an understanding of the ways Black German theater uses pieces of Black writing, song, images, and fabric. Artists who create Black German theater also engage with theory to create their own identities. Julia Kristeva first coined the term "intertextuality" in her 1969 book *Sémiotikè* (translated into English in 1980 as *Desire in Language*) as a way to describe how texts inform each other. Kristeva explains, "In the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another."[74] Since then, countless theorists have engaged with the term and the definition of it has evolved. Graham Allen's notion of intertextuality demonstrates how texts have relationships with one another. Allen explains, "Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life."[75] Allen's use of intertextuality as relationality and interconnectedness is particularly useful for me, and it will be the way I use the term. John Frow has also seen the transformative nature of intertextuality. He explains, "Texts are therefore not structures of presence but traces and tracings of otherness. They are shaped by the repetition and the transformation of other textual structures."[76] This tracing

[74] Julia Kristeva, "The Bounded Text," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia, 1980), 36.

[75] Graham Allen, "Intertextuality for Literary and Culture Scholarship," in *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

[76] John Frowe, "Intertextuality and Ontology," in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), 45.

of otherness and other works is evident in Afro-German plays as intentional and self-reflective. The intertextual references act as building blocks upon which Black German theater builds. In the plays featured in the dissertation, intertextuality does not neutralize meaning as Kristeva says, but instead intertextual references help establish meaning through borrowing from various German and African diasporic references. Intertextuality is useful in thinking how Black Germans weave together elements of other works to perform their own stories.

If intertexuality explains how Black German theater practitioners weave their stories together, diaspora, and more specifically "diasporic iconography" explains why. Jacqueline Nassy Brown analyzes the importance of the diaspora in Europe. She uses artifacts such as music, but also people and places and what she calls "iconography, the ideas and ideologies associated with them."[77] Brown describes the use of "diasporic iconography" in Europe as a resource to "appropriate particular aspects of 'black American' for particular reasons, to meet particular needs—but to do so within limits, within and against power asymmetries, and with political consequences." In her piece entitled "The Crowded Space of Diaspora," Campt uses the theory of Brown to understand the way the African diaspora, specifically African American culture, travels to Europe. Campt has shown that Brown's theories about Blackness in the United Kingdom are also relevant in German contexts. According to Campt, "Brown engages the stakes of the discourse of 'black America' in black British articulations of diaspora and

[77] Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, 42.

offers an important intervention in the discussion of diasporic relation."[78] With pieces of the diaspora, Black Germans engage in identity creation to meet the challenge posed by a lack of widespread knowledge of Black German history. The plays examined in this dissertation set up a vibrant forward movement through their collaborative nature, condemnation of microaggressions in society, and use of the diasporic iconography.

On a textual and performance level, Afro-German playwrights incorporate intertextuality through their references to Afro-German artists as well as to Black authors from Africa, the United States, and elsewhere. A central inspiration also comes from the work of May Ayim (1960-1996). In a very transparent way, authors Sebastian Fleary, Lara Milagro, Olumide Popoola and Olivia Wenzel discuss everyday racism, which appears in Ayim's poetry collection *Blues in schwarz weiss*. In her poems "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II" the respondent is considered foreign because of her Blackness. At the core, this assumption is at the heart of all the plays featured in this dissertation. Olumide Popoola draws upon the work of Lorraine Hansberry, using a quote from Beneatha Younger about money from *A Raisin in the Sun*, and further gleaning inspiration from Hansberry's posthumously published work *To be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1969). Popoola draws inspiration from Hansberry's portrayal of a fragmented family, racism and economic tribulations. Finally, Fleary and the actors in *real life: Deutschland* have gained inspiration from multiple sources: the work of Audre Lorde; the

[78] Tina Campt, "The Crowded Space of Diaspora: Intercultural Address and the Tensions of Diasporic Relation," *Radical History Review* 83 (2002): 97.

poetry of May Ayim; *Yearning* (1990) by bell hooks; and Sojourner Truth's speech "Aint I a Woman?" just to name a few.[79]

These Afro-German performances include references to—and thus create—diasporic community on stage. These intertextual formulations take place in images, music, spoken and performance language, props, and dance. An image of May Ayim, for example, is projected on stage during performances of *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*. The performance also projects other notable Black celebrities on the screen, such as Michael Jackson and German soccer star Steffi Jones, among others. Performance of text as spoken word is also important to Afro-German theater. Ayim's poems "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II," from her aforementioned collection *Blues in schwarz weiß*, are revised multiple times in different scenarios in three scenes of the play. Further, actors wear brightly colored Ankara wax fabric at the start of the play, while the stage directions call for a waltz and an "African" dance to the Congolese song "Zing Zong." In *real life: Deutschland*, the actors also wear Ankara fabric during one scene. Utilizing literature, actors in the play perform Ayim's poem verbatim on stage during one of the scenes. Finally, *real life: Deutschland* features a musical clip from the African American singing group En Vogue. Similarly, music in the play *Also by Mail* includes the Notorious B.I.G. song "Mo' Money, Mo' Problems," played on African drums by the musicians onstage. Further, Popoola's play takes place in Nigeria and Germany to demonstrate how cultural differences occur within the diaspora.

[79] YoungStars, "Dokumentation des YoungStar Theater Projektes" (copyrighted unpublished manuscript, 2008).

E. Theater Scholarship

1. Historical Context: A Place to Create German Identity

The plays in this dissertation fit into a larger framework of German theater and thus intervene into German theater historiography. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, early German theater sought to form a sense of German national identity. The legacy of eighteenth-century theater today is thus in identity politics. Theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte argues, based on the work of Johann Christoph Gottsched, Friedrich Schiller, and J. H. Zedler, that eighteenth-century German theater was intended as social and moral education and social critique.[80] German theater sought to "dignify the German language while validating [the German] world-view and embodying their values."[81] Michael Sosulski argues that early German theater was a place of nation-building,[82] and even more importantly for my project, theater not only became interested in the notion of identity, it "became the locus of national identity."[83] In this section, Goethe and Brecht will be my main focus as key canonical figures in theater as political art.

From the eighteenth century to the present, theater has continued to play a role in the formation of German cultural identities and has informed German national identity.

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[80] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Von der Wanderbühne zum Nationaltheater," *Kurze Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (Tübingen: Franke, 1993), 84. Specifically, Fischer-Lichte references Gottsched's *Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen* (1729), Schiller's lecture "Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?" (1784), and Zedler's *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (1742).

[81] Meech, 66.

[82] Michael Sosulski, *Theater and Nation in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 6.

[83] Ibid., 7.

Fischer-Lichte explains that the stage was the space of solidifying national identity and also criticizing society.[84] Goethe sought to develop German intellectual and spiritual development.[85] Fischer-Lichte explains: "The theater . . . is given a wholly new function: it should recover the totality, or wholeness . . . , for each and every citizen, that is mankind in general."[86] Early German playwrights sought to create German culture and used the stage to generate empathy and teach German virtue. Playwrights did this by focusing on audiences. The playwrights engaged audiences to think about societal norms and expectations. These plays attacked societal norms that put the members of the emerging middle class in a vulnerable position.[87] German theater was intended to educate bourgeois audiences by generating empathy.[88]

Theater's larger stake in contemporary society can also be seen in Goethe's vision for the stage space. For him, the theater was not a space to present natural human behavior. Instead, the actors were meant to remember that they were on stage for the sake of the audience. Fischer-Lichte explains: ". . . Goethe tried to prevent the illusion of reality being created on stage."[89] Fischer-Lichte also explains that Goethe's aesthetic did not evoke empathy from the audience: "[The acting style] guaranteed a certain aesthetic

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[84] Fischer-Lichte, "The Mutilated Individual," *History of European Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 171.

[85] Fisher-Lichte, "Middle-Class Bildungstheater," *History of European Theater*, 200.

[86] Fischer-Lichte, "The Ideal Society of Autonomous Individuals," *History of European Theater*, 184.

[87] Fischer-Lichte, "The Fall of the Bourgeois Myths," *History of European Theater*, 250.

[88] Fischer-Lichte, "Middle Class Bildungstheater," 200-201.

[89] Ibid., 199.

distance which should enable the spectator to receive the performance as a learning, cultivating experience."[90] This idea is noteworthy because Black German theater uses empathy and identification productively which I will show later in this section. Although Goethe's ideals for the stage were not actualized,[91] his ideals took root in the cultural imagination.

There are multiple connections to Goethe's theory found in the theories of Brecht. Like Goethe, Brecht sought audience engagement in terms of political and societal change. However, with Brecht, there was a return to theater as an educational project to intervene in society to spark a revolution from the lower classes. His work sought to transform German culture and also took up Goethe's disengagement with empathy in order to transform German society into a collective of engaged citizens. Brecht wanted audiences to continuously think during the theater production, and he also wanted audiences to take politics outside of the theater. He sought to reeducate German society.[92] While current scholars engage in Brechtian scholarship with feminist and critical race theories, there were not his primary points of intervention. Afro-German theater places itself in conversation with Goethe and Brecht as key figures in radical and transformative notions of theater. Engaging with canonical playwrights and theater ideals, Afro-German theater intersects with and intervenes into the history of German theater. Afro-German theater shares a similar expectation for audiences to Goethe and Brecht. Both visionaries

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[90] Ibid., 200.

[91] Instead, Fischer-Lichte explains that audiences still enjoyed slapstick and crude comedies in her chapter "The Fall of the Bourgeois Myths," in *History of European Theater*, 244.

[92] Erika Hughes, "Brecht's Lehrstücke and Drama Education," in *Key Concepts in Theater/Drama*, ed. Shifra Schonmann (Boston: Sense, 2011), 197.

developed theater for white German audiences, making their theater exclusionary in nature. They created theater for white Germans without considering other types of Germanness, largely leaving out intersectional discourses. Afro-German theater takes the tools of theater to open up the meaning of Germanness. Afro-German theater practicioners work to intervene by taking the tools to reify white Germanness and challenging homogenous notions of German identity by addressing identity politics in their theater.

While Black German theater shares a position of asking audience members to think critically like Brecht and Goethe, importantly, Black German theater actualizes education in different ways. Black German theater takes the idea of generating empathy and education and reverses it. Instead of generating empathy and educating audiences on how to be German, it is as much for the actor as it is for an audience. Black German theater focuses on empowerment and resistance for the actor and audience member. It incites audiences to question why Black Germans have not been allowed to share national identity. Afro-German theater informs audiences of the multiple ways they are complicit in the exclusion of Black German experience. The theater names microaggressions and validate Afro-Germans' experiences with racism in German society. This theater serves to remind the actors themselves and other Black Germans what it means to navigate German society. Instead of brushing these experiences off and diminishing themselves, the actors validate their own and each other's experiences. This theater is also accusatory—asking audiences if they are complicit in the microaggressions performed on stage. This type of theater is transformative. Black German theater thus uses the original tools of German theater and reimagines their possibilities for the stage.

While theater practitioners have always been cognizant of theater's potential power to transform audiences, this power is a problem if it comes from an authority figure. Brecht's theater had a top-down structure; one person was really the mastermind behind the piece. Having a leader results in an uneven power dynamic. An uneven power dynamic thwarts dialog because one person is in charge of the narrative and distributes a singular agenda. However, Black German theater, in contrast, democratizes power through collaborative work. Black German theater allows audiences and actors to partake in a shared dialogue of exploring the limits of German identity.

The plays I look at explore the numerous ways in which German identity is reduced to white identity. Witnessing these scenes leads to self-reflection for audiences and actors alike. One example of the power of performing these scenes comes from an Afro-German actress, Simone Dede Ayivi. In an interview with feminist podcasters Kleinerdrei, Ayivi explains the historical power of the German stage as an actor thusly:

> Als Schwarze Frau die Frechheit zu besitzen, sich auf eine deutsche Theaterbühne zu stellen und zu sagen 'Jetzt bin ich hier. Jetzt mache ich, was ich will!,' und dabei eben nicht zuerst die Interessen, das Vorwissen und die Sehgewohnheiten eines weißen Publikums im Blick zu haben—sondern in mich reinzuhören und zu versuchen, Theater zu machen, das ich gern sehen würde—das ist ein Akt der Befreiung, bedeutet Selbstbestimmung und Selbstliebe. [As a Black woman, to own the audacity to stand on the German stage and say 'Now, I am here. I do what I want!' and even to not care about the interests or preferences of white audiences, instead to reach within myself and to try to make theater that I would want to see—that is an act of freedom, it means self-determination and self-love.] [93]

[93] Stefan Mesch, "Als Schwarze Frau die Frechheit zu besitzen: Simone Dede Ayivi im Gespräch," *Kleinerdrei*, July 13, 2016, http://kleinerdrei.org/2016/07/als-schwarze-frau-die-frechheit-zu-besitzen-sich-auf-eine-deutsche-buehne-zu-stellen-theatermacherin-simone-dede-ayivi-im-gespraech/

For Ayivi, her Blackness on stage brings self-love and self-worth, regardless of what a German audience expects. Afro-German theater thus opens the possibilities for a democratic theater project undertaken in the spirit of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas of empathy and education to redefine what empathy and education look like on the German stage.

2. Modern Scholarship on Black German Theater

Compared to the literature on German theater, very little has been written about Black German theater. Theater scholar Tania Meyer's text *Gegenstimmbildung: Strategien rassismuskritischer Theaterarbeit* (2016) discusses racism on stage with respect to the larger German society. Meyer examines migration discourse in two plays that took place in 2004 and 2005 that were socio-cultural community theater projects: *Amo, eine dramatische Spurensuche* (a biography of Amo and his life and the racism he experienced, reflecting contemporary racism) and *Bombenwetter: Das Kopftuch halt* (a reaction to Schiller's *Nathan der Weise*). As a series of fragments and collages, *Bombenwetter: Das Kopftuch halt* was performed at the Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium and at festivals,[94] while *Amo, eine dramatische Spurensuche* was performed at the Theater im Pumpehaus in Münster. Meyer spends most of the book describing and defining racism, a logical choice based on her German audience. Meyer uses intercultural theory and leans on Fischer-Lichte's work on theater of the 1970s and 1980s. Meyer positions her work in theater studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. At the root, Meyer examines race and challenges racism not just on stage, but in German society. Her idea of the

[94] Tania Meyer, *Gegenstimmbildung Strategien rassismuskritischer Theaterarbeit* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 241.

Gegenstimmbildung is about agency, the creation of something new against a white German canon.

There has also been mention of Black German theater in Vanessa Plumly's dissertation. In her intersectional analysis, Plumly analyzes performances and evocations of *Heimat* by Afro-/Black Germans post-*Wende*. In her multi-genre research, she describes the idea of *Heimat*: "In Black German works, *Heimat* is not just perceived as a nationally imagined space/community; it is much more. It is often simultaneously a number of localities and positionings (*Heimat/en*)."[95] Plumly examines the "plurality of meanings of *Heimat*" in Black German performance, literature, and film (5). In her research on *Heimat,* she views Afro-/Black Germans as evoking multiple spaces: German nation, German *Heimat,* and African diaspora. Plumly says what binds them is their heterogeneity (67). She focuses on theater in the chapter entitled "Performing *Heimat/en* On Stage: Label Noir's Theatrical Production *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*." While there are multiple theories and theorists upon which she bases her work, Plumly engages heavily with Tina Campt on the diaspora, Celia Applegate and Peter Blickle on definitions of *Heimat*, Schlink on *Heimat* and exile, Julia Kristeva on exile, Judith Butler on performativity, and Benedict Anderson and Louis Althusser on nations and national identity.

In the book *Spiegelblicke*, Black German artists, authors and performers also describe and analyze their work and experiences in their own words. Most important for my research are the articles by Lara Milagro, Sarah Bergh, and Simone Dede Ayivi. Milagro discusses her experience as an actress and her early experience as child acting in

[95] Plumly, 4. Hereafter cited in text.

school plays. After connecting with May Ayim's work, Milagro felt more politically engaged and explains that Ayim's work laid the foundation for Label Noir. She discusses her experiences working with Label Noir and calls *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* a change in perspective on the German stage.[96] Sara Bergh discusses her leadership role in the play *Kosmos BRD* (2008).[97] Bergh created this youth empowerment project in conjunction with Grada Kilomba's workshop "Bilder vom Schwarzen Menschen—Reden über Rassismus." In this article, one of the former actors discusses her experience in the play and their tour at various schools. Finally, Dede Ayivi also focuses on Black actors in Germany and the prevalence of and preference for white actors at German theaters.

Julia Wissert analyzes Black German theater in her creative 2014 Diplomarbeit "Schwarz macht weiß," which she did at the Universität Mozarteum in Salzburg. Taking a mostly non-theoretical approach, she examines Black identity and the portrayal of Black identity as inherently foreign identity in the context of the German nation. Further, Wissert discusses blackfacing, clichéd roles, and structural racism on stage in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. She conducted fifteen interviews with actors and dramaturgs from German-speaking nations. As a theater practitioner herself, she transforms the answers from her interviews into a series of monologues. Some monologues reflect racist casting practices; if a role does not say it is for a Black person, then it is always intended

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[96] Lara-Sophie Milagro, "The Afro-Actor's Experience: Von Schafen und anderen Rollen," in *Spiegelblicke: Perspectiven Schwarzer Bewegung in Deutschland*, ed. Denise Bergold-Caldwell, Camilia Ridha, Christelle Nkwendja-Ngnoubamdjum, Elenore Wiedenroth-Coulibaly, Hadija Haruna-Oelker, and Laura Digoh (Berlin: Orlanda, 2015), 201.

[97] Sarah Bergh, and Naomi Lwanyaga, "Kosmos BRD--Typisch Deutsch und doch besonders?: Ein Storytelling-Projekt mit Schwarzen Jugendlichen von Sarah Bergh im Gespräch mit Naomi Lwanyaga" in *Spiegelblicke: Perspectiven Schwarzer Bewegung in Deutschland,* ed. Denise Bergold-Caldwell et al (Berlin: Orlanda, 2015), 209-10.

for a white person.[98] Alternatively, one monologue explains that Black German actors are not Black (dark) enough for the "African" roles. Another monologue thematizes sexuality that is expected from Black actresses in Germany, in particular: "Man nimmt gerne schwarze Frauen, weil die irgendwie so was sexy lebenfrohes vermitteln/Unkompliziert/Lachen/ Tanzen/Und singen, was auch immer"[99] [One happily takes Black women because they somehow convey a happy-go-lucky, uncomplicated, laughing, dancing, and singing, whatever]. Considering race and gender, Wissert's interviews provide readers with a glimpse into the actors' experiences in their own words. Their retellings are heartbreaking, angering, and shocking. However, Wissert is masterful and creative in crafting her interviews into a play.

My work contributes to the conversation Wissert and Plumly have started. Such unpublished research helps inform my work by engaging Black identity and contemporary German theater. Wissert's creative work engages with personal interviews of a larger Black German theater community than I investigate; she investigates Austria and Switzerland. While my work examines plays and performances, Wissert's work discusses what Black Germans actors live with daily and what they take with them into every audition. Plumly's dissertation, in contrast, informs my project through her analysis of *Heimat*, nation and diaspora, as my project also takes up the notion of nation and belonging in multiple plays. While our works are in dialogue on the topic of contemporary theater, I focus more specifically on plays and performance. Wissert's analysis of Black German actors sheds light on casting practices and preferences for

[98] Julia Wissert, "Schwarz.macht.weiß" (Diplomarbeit, Universität Salzburg, 2014), 17.

[99] Wissert, 43.

white actors. Plumly's research analyzes how Afro-Germans engage with the theme of *Heimat* and negotiating a Black identity. My work considers both the actor and the subject material, as well as the call to action addressed to the audience. I analyze multiple plays, their content, and performances. With my work, I bring in an analysis of intertextuality and theater theory.

3. My Dissertation Focus

I argue that Black German theater makes Black Germans' racialized and gendered experiences visible to white and Black German audiences. With this theater, I suggest, actors subvert expectations; telling non-linear stories and working collaboratively, actors draw together pieces of the diaspora to reflect their own Black German identities. Encapsulated in this representation of Black German identity, I argue, the plays encompass change in the present (as in *real life: Deutschland* and *Also by Mail*), or a hope for change in the future (as in *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* and *Mais in Deutschland*). I believe this project highlights the efforts of Black German theater practitioners to claim their identities on the German stage. Both historically and in contemporary German culture, the stage has served as one important place where German national identity was formed and continues to be formed.

Black German actors use the stage to be visible as part of a political and subversive movement. With my project, I choose to document performances that would otherwise largely be lost or forgotten. These performances disappear when they are not recorded. Still, even a recording is not ideal. A recording of a play or production cannot replicate the atmosphere, the audience's reaction, or even pick up on small nuances that are incredibly hard to catch through a recording. I was able to attend the plays as an

audience member, which allows me to engage with the plays in a different way. Theater is an ephemeral form.[100] Fischer-Lichte explains the ephemerality of theater: ". . . [T]he performance is irrevocably lost once it is over; it can never be repeated in the exact same way."[101] Theater is in the here and now, and impermanence of theater informs the production of the plays. Fischer-Lichte clarifies the impermanence of theater: "Performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artifacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present."[102]

Like theater, microaggressions occur in daily life, which are also ephemeral. Performing microaggressions empowers, however, as it tells audiences that the microaggressions have happened and are not forgotten. Fischer-Lichte illustrates how theater is like life: "In a way, performance can be thought of both as life itself and as its model. It is life itself because it takes up the real time of the participants' lives and offers them the possibility to constantly bring themselves forth anew."[103] Reclaiming these moments, the actors mimic the lived experience of microaggressions in a stage performance. Calling on moments of microaggression, the actors refuse to forget them, draw attention to them, and perform them from their perspective. The mental impact of the microaggression continues, but the actor is no longer alone; all the audience members

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[100] For more on the ephemerality of theater, see Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[101] Fischer-Lichte, "The Performative Generation of Materiality," in *Transformative Power of Performance*, 75.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Fischer-Lichte, "The Performance as Event," in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 205.

watch and rewatch these ephemeral moments as moments of reclamation. It is a painful but validating experience. Considering the many problematic roles and depictions to which Black Germans are subjected, it is important to counter negative portrayals with realistic depictions of Black German identities. By depicting themselves and their daily lives, Black Germans have seized control over their own representation.

Representation has political ramifications. In her work on the visual representation of women, Laura Mulvey has shown that women were not in charge of their representations. Instead, she explains that women were "bearer[s], not maker[s] of meaning."[104] Similarly, Black characters on German stages have been "bearers of meaning" in the imaginations of white playwrights and dramaturgs. In representations written from a white perspective, the Black characters routinely find themselves outside of the German nation[105] instead of part of it. Black German theater works to subvert expectations and assumptions about Black German identity. Black German theater empowers actors and audience members to understand and consider the Black experience in Germany. Afro-German playwright and actor Ayivi says, "Community-Events empowern mich. Verantstaltungen, bei denen viele Schwarze Menschen oder People of Color zusammenkommen und ich mich über Kunst, Politik und Freundschaft austauschen kann"[106] [Community events empower me. Events, attended by many Black people or People of Color and I can have an exchange with them about art, politics, and friendship]. The African diaspora and intertextuality provide frameworks for the analysis of identity

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[104] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 15.

[105] See Dea Lohrer's *Unschuld* (2003).

[106] Mesch, "Als Schwarze Frau."

politics present in Black German theater productions. Afro-German identity politics are created on stage through negotiation that are enmeshed in moments of empowerment. These actors refute negative portrayals by working collaboratively to transform the perception of Black people in Germany. Traditional notions of German identity have created the invisibility of Black Germans. Analogously, Black German theater is missing from critical German scholarship.

Part of the reason for Black German invisibility is that Black Germans are assumedly outside the German nation, particularly presumed to derive from the occupation of US American soldiers. The plays I have chosen to analyze destabilize the United States and its assumed effect on a Black population in Germany. Black German identity assumedly comes from an African American identity. However, my plays show that American identity is almost never the root of Black German identity, nor its center. Instead, the plays relegate America to the margins.

Because Black German identity is not solely U.S. American based, it makes connections to other parts of the African diaspora. In my dissertation, I therefore explore the relevance of Diaspora Studies, analyzing Grada Kilomba's theories of exclusion for Afro-Germans, Michelle Wright's theories of a diaspora beyond the Middle Passage epistemology, and May Ayim's theory of how Afro-German identities are reduced to Black (and therefore outside the German nation). I will explore the use of elements of African diasporic culture to simultaneously create a transnational community and critique German society. Intertextuality allows connection across the diaspora. Black German theater incorporates intertextuality to do what Patricia Hills Collins calls "reaffirming" Black feminist thought to discuss microaggressions. Collins' notion of reaffirmation

validates the experiences of Black women and continues to reference Black women so their work and ideas are not lost or forgotten. In the case of the plays featured within the dissertation, the plays reaffirm women who discuss Afro-Germans' experiences in Germany and in particular microaggressions. Reaffirmations work with microaggressions for the purpose of empowerment. These reaffirmations discuss the microaggressions in Black literature. Specifically, the plays reference recent iterations of reaffirmation by Grada Kilomba, go back a few decades to poet and activist May Ayim, and go as far back as reaffirming and rearticulating the work of Sojourner Truth. Referencing works of Black women brings their voices from the past to present. By referencing canonical work by Black women, actors and audience members are in dialogue with these famous Black theorists, who historically have not been given their due attention. Intertextuality seeks to create a place in which Black Germans can situate themselves locally in Germany and globally within the diaspora. This positioning of identity allows Black German agency on behalf of their own identity and affirmation of Black writers. As a result, Germany does not become whitewashed, and Black German stories are not ignored.

Source Material

This section will review materials I am using in this project. Materials include: scripts, performances, interviews, personal recordings, email correspondence, and reviews. Together, these give an understanding of theater techniques, including performing the diaspora instead of relying solely on texts. Theater requires you to meet and talk to living human beings, watch live plays, and be in dialogue with people in charge of creating. Because this is an emerging genre, it is an open scholarly field. There is so much research to be done.

I was lucky enough to have had in-person exchanges with these actors and attended these plays. While studying abroad in Freiburg in 2010-2011, I attended *Clybourne Park* and met actress Lara-Sophie Milagro, who is the director of the Black German ensemble Label Noir. During our meeting, I learned about Label Noir's production of *Heimat, bittersüße, Heimat*. This play marked the genesis of my project on Black German theater. On a later research grant, supported by the UMass Amherst Graduate School and Women in German, I was able to compile an archive of interviews with Black German actors and playwrights. I interviewed six people involved in Black German theater: author Elizabeth Blonzen; dramaturgs and producers Philipp Khabo Köpsell, Sharon Otoo, Sebastian Fleary, Olivia Wenzel, and Nora Haakh; and playwrights and actresses Amina Eisner and Lara-Sophie Milagro. These interviews each lasted roughly two hours. From our conversations, I learned about the production of *Mais in Deutschland*, which significantly expands my analysis of Black German theater by presenting a Black East German perspective on race in my dissertation. Spending time in Germany conducting interviews and forming relationships with prominent figures within the Black German theater community has been invaluable to this dissertation. My correspondence and contact with actors and dramaturgs has continued, and they have been willing to offer clarifications. These interviews have also helped me understand the process of the plays and the audience's reactions to performances I was unable to attend. In these interviews, I was also able to ask about the playwright's influences and inspiration. Unfortunately, I was not able to research the youth play *Kosmos BRD* (2008) or *Schwarz tragen* (2013) because I was not able to watch the plays and stay in contact with those involved. However, I believe the four plays in the dissertation offer a good

cross-section, as they represent a range of production and performance approaches and of subject matter.

Chapter Overview

Chapter II focuses on *real life: Deutschland* (2008), a play that began as a Black youth empowerment theater project. It served as a safe space for young people to explore their experiences, express anger, and be validated as Black German. The scenes in their play focus on childhood microaggressions: being called a N*** on the playground, dealing with a racist white German teacher, being aggressively approached in the *Diskothek* by an older white German man as a Black teen. The actors also made intertextual connections to May Ayim, Sojourner Truth, and the 1990's R&B group En Vogue. In their most controversial scene, they flip a scene from the Australian movie *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), about the attempt to "absorb" Aboriginals (committing cultural genocide) into the white population; instead of Aborigines in Australia, the young actors discuss overcoming the problem of whiteness in Europe and propose intermarriage as a way to help whites overcome the problem of their whiteness. The group worked collaboratively on skits, and eventually on the performances, in an egalitarian manner. In this chapter, I argue that the teens performed scenes of oppression as a way to empower themselves and imagine change. It sparked the beginning of Afro-German theater in Germany and the use of the stage as a space for performing oppression while also building empowerment through community.

Chapter III discusses the play *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* (2010), performed by the professional Black German theater group Label Noir. Unlike *real life: Deutschland*, *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* features adults and presents daily microaggressions from an

adult perspective. I argue that Label Noir performs the daily life of Afro-Germans in an empowering way. Through images of family and friends, Label Noir elicits audience emotions, making the play incredibly personal. Images also depict Black people across the globe, creating a diasporic experience. The diaspora emerges further in the play through the use of Kanda Bongo Man's song "Zing Zong" and the rewriting of May Ayim's poem "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II." *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* and *real life: Deutschland* are similar in their storytelling through vignettes, in lieu of through a linear storyline. Further, both plays traveled around Germany and both focus on the relatable, general experiences of being Black in Germany.

Chapter IV examines Olumide Popoola's *Also by Mail* (2013). Popoola's play is a family drama that utilizes the African diaspora in alluding to literature, music, and mythology. This is the only play in the dissertation by a single author. *Also by Mail* deals with Afro-German siblings who live in Germany and travel to Nigeria for their father's funeral. The play highlights the kinds of microaggressions that Black people in Germany experience on public transit, but the siblings become empowered because justice is served in response to microaggression. Popoola uses the diasporic trope of ancestral spirits to work through death—not as the end, but rather the beginning of knowledge.[107] Most importantly, *Also by Mail* takes audiences outside of Germany for the first time, as the play takes place primarily in Nigeria. This play marks a departure from the previous plays. Like many other recent Afro-German poems, plays, and short stories, *Also by Mail* is in English. Further, it has a storyline that is not always linear and concentrates on the

[107] This is also common in African American texts by Toni Morrison and Caribbean texts by Gisèle Pineau, Maryse Condé and many others.

experiences of two siblings. Unlike the previous two plays, the play has been cold-read in both England and Germany, but has not been performed.

Chapter V examines Black identity in former East Germany in the play *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* (2015), by (East) German playwright and poet Olivia Wenzel. The play premiered at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Berlin in February 2015 and was a collaboration with all involved, like *real life: Deutschland* and *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*. A young Afro-German man, Noah, recounts his life growing up with his white East German mother, Susanne. Their strained relationship is the focal point of the play, as is Noah's strong desire to connect with her. The play evokes diaspora through music and everyday racism. Additionally, it highlights the ideas of home and exclusion. The mother could not leave the confines of East Germany, while Noah's father was forced out of East Germany once his working permit ended. This play centralizes an aspect of life that the other Afro-German plays have yet to confront—the relationship of a Black German to a white German parent. The play also adds the perspective of microaggressions experienced in East Germany. *Also by Mail* took audiences outside of Germany to Nigeria; *Mais* starts in East Germany and ends in outer space. Beyond Earth, Noah finds empowerment. In his imagination, outer space represents a space of radical potential. *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* thus pushes into several new issues and approaches that had yet to be explored and performed in Afro-German theater.

F. Conclusion: The End Is The Beginning

My dissertation contends that in performing race and empowerment, Afro-German theater is a vibrant cultural art form that establishes diasporic identity through forging connections across boundaries. The diaspora helps bridge intertextuality and

identity formation in ways that help analyze these plays. I argue that Brown's notion of "diasporic iconography" is a model for how Black German actors use the African diaspora to express and create various Black German identities. This diasporic tapestry is woven on stage, supporting, most importantly, theories by People of Color and empowering Black audiences.

Intertextuality provides a way for theater practitioners to connect to a larger community. Through making connections, actors can be empowered by the works they reference. Each play has chosen to highlight empowerment for Black Germans in different ways. In *real life: Deutschland*, the youth found empowerment in improvisation and learning about other oppressed people around the globe; *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* empowers through providing agency while combating daily microaggressions; *Also by Mail* empowers through the stories of an ancestor who shares the racism he faced in Germany and also works from beyond the grave to help the characters in their daily lives; *Mais in Deutschland* empowers through using alternative space (outer space and the ocean) to help the main character find peace. This new genre is already evolving, pushing boundaries in a real and metaphorical sense. Finally, these plays perform and create empowerment through intertextuality; they showcase the works of Black authors and artists across the African diaspora in order to make sense of Black German lives and experiences, thereby rearticulating and reaffirming previous Black artistic work.

These plays are not asking audiences to merely witness racism and think "Isn't this sad?" Instead, the plays ask audiences if what they witness on stage is an acceptable way to treat other people. Through detailed scenes of intertextuality, diaspora, and racism in the plays, Black Germans claim agency over their experiences. Black German actors

gain from the performance itself as well. The plays provide a sense of empowerment for actors who perform roles that are not maids or jezebels; the actors are empowered by performing Black experiences in Germany and elsewhere, and thus Black actors create a sense of being seen and heard in their own identities.

CHAPTER II

PERFORMING BLACK YOUTH IDENTITY IN *real life: Deutschland* (2008)

A. Introduction

real life: Deutschland was a theater project devised by Sebastian Fleary between 2006-2009. As a series of vignettes, the project was based on improvisation as a way for youth to devise new ways to think about oppression. For his final project in theater pedagogy at the Universität Bielefeld, Fleary knew he wanted to work with Afro-German youth across Germany.[108] At the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD) annual "Bundestreffen" meeting in Bavaria in 2005, he asked teenagers if they would be interested in a theater project. The Bundestreffen takes place annually over a weekend in August. The event serves as a safe space for Afro-Germans and Black Germans from all over Germany to meet in an effort to resist isolation that Black people in Germany face. The three-day event includes lectures, discussions, information booths, workshops, lectures, and a children's program.[109] The teens' engagement with ISD can be seen as a demonstration of their and their parents' political interest in Black people in Germany. Because Fleary's project began at the ISD Bundestreffen, only certain Afro-/Black German children were involved: those with one African parent or who knew others at the

[108] Sebastian Fleary, interview by Jamele Watkins, Berlin, July 9, 2014.

[109] "Black Community Weekend," ISD, accessed February 4, 2016, http://isdonline.de/black-community-weekend/.

event.[110] The physical space of meeting and performing affected who had access to the project.

As a Black youth empowerment project, *real life: Deutschland* brought together Afro-Germans from across Germany. After finding interested teens from the Bundestreffen, the teens, aged 16-21, participated in educational workshops on oppression and improvisation over the course of several subsequent weekends. They decided to perform memorable improvised scenes at a public event and then met consecutively for two weeks prior to the premiere. These weekends provided a safe space for the teens to meet without the pressure and microaggressions present when living in the white space of the German majority. The teens involved in the project explain: "Mit der Projektarbeit und unserem Stück wollten wir Rassismus in Deutschland zur Sprache bringen; ihn mit der anschließenden Tour für die Zuschauenden sichtbar machen und seine Existenz und Auswirkungen auf das Leben festhalten" [With this project and our work we wanted to bring up the issue of racism in Germany. The project and the closing tour were intended to make racism apparent for the audience and records its existence and its impacts on life].[111] The project as a whole gave the teens space, literally and figuratively, to experiment, to play, and to develop their own models for liberation without having to censor themselves. This project is significant for Afro-German drama as a groundbreaking performance of Afro-German youth experience.

Deeming themselves the YoungStars, about a dozen teens experienced the project in its entirety, while others joined and left the group throughout the process. Because the

[110] However, this would have been difficult for a child from an all-white family.

[111] Youngstars, "Dokubroschüre," 6.

youth all knew each other prior to beginning the project, trust among them was already established.[112] *real life: Deutschland* was not originally intended to be performed for a paying audience, but instead was improvised for the teens themselves. It was not until 2008 that the group decided to perform for the public.[113] The teens were in charge of organizing a central part of the project: they produced a play to be performed in their respective hometowns. Afro-German youth could thus be seen in a different role rather than just as children, taking ownership of a play they helped create. The teens included local artists as opening acts in each of the cities they visited. This collaboration is important as well, because it itself constitutes another type of improvisation besides the improvisation they achieve on stage. There are aspects about this project that make it unique. As a project and improvised play developed by children, *real life: Deutschland* presents a unique set of considerations. Therefore, I will approach this work with the critical awareness that it was completed by youth and non-trained actors.

Additionally, it is essential to consider the improvisational nature of this theater project. The lack of direction of the project could be regarded negatively. The project changed and went through different metamorphoses as time went on. On the one hand, it seems like there was no fixed direction, while on the other, logistical financial concerns certainly played a role. I consider this situation as a benefit to continue a project that had no particular end goal and therefore was more process-oriented than performance-oriented. I am of the opinion that the improvisation process yielded a different type of empowerment for the youth than the performance. The improvisation required them to

[112] Sebastian Fleary, interview by Jamele Watkins, July 24, 2014.

[113] YoungStars, 27.

actively participate and generate knowledge. Improvisation does not require an audience, but instead a group of actors collaborating and experimenting with each other to create something new. A performance for the actors themselves shifts traditional dynamics in theater from the audience to the individual performer. Memorable scenes from the improvisation were carried into the stage performance, which drew connections to a wider African diaspora.

The unconventional dimensions of this theater project extended to the choice of venue as well. Instead of performing in a theater, an institution that tends to receive German state funding, the YoungStars performed in cultural centers throughout Germany. Cultural centers do not always attract the same audiences as a commercial theater, but there are benefits to choosing this type of venue. Unlike professional theaters, cultural centers have little stake in how a play comes together; the actors and creators in *real life: Deutschland* thus had complete control over the process, the subject matter, and the length of the production. Audiences were diverse and ranged from fifty to one hundred and fifty people. The stage was mainly bare, with the exception of boxes during a dance scene and a table during the "Africanization of Europe" scene. The teens also seemed to not have special clothing, with the exception of the "Africanization of Europe" scene, when the teens wore lab coats and name badges. The patchwork play lasted approximately one hour, not including intermission, and was performed on stage at several cultural centers: IBZ Bielefeld, Westwerk in Hamburg, Werkstatt der Kulturen in Berlin, GeyserHaus in Leipzig, Kulturzentrum Merlin in Stuttgart, IG Feuerwache in Munich, Kinder- Jugendzentrum Glashüttee in Cologne, and the Jugendhaus Heideplatz in Frankfurt/Main. Each city was one of the performers' hometowns with the exception

of Leipzig and Frankfurt. The YoungStars chose the last two cities because they knew there was a Black population there.[114]

real life: Deutschland is non-linear sixty-minute performance. The play consists of multiple vignettes of realistic acting. Along with leaders Sebastian Fleary, Patricia Göthe, and Sharon Otoo, the teens devised eleven short scenes that focus on youth experiences: being called the N-word on the playground; singing the children's song "Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann? Niemand, niemand"; asking what is means to be called "dreckig" or a "N***rkind"; dealing with a racist white German teacher; and being aggressively approached in a *Diskothek* by an older white German man. Engaging with these experiences of everyday racism, the play served as a space to be empowered as a Black person in Germany.

This chapter draws upon personal video footage of the performance in Cologne in December 2008 and interviews with the actors and director conducted in summer 2014 in Berlin.[115] This venue appeared like a traditional theater stage, raised, with multiple lighting options. In addition, I use the "Dokubroschüre" entitled "Dokumentation des YoungStar Theater Projektes," a fifty-two page unpublished document written collaboratively by members of the group[116] and sold at the performances. It outlines the

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[114] Fleary, interview, July 9, 2014.

[115] The DVD (Die Doku) offered for purchase by ISD and the DVD for the performance are not the same. The DVD on sale documents the process, warm-up acting drills, and actor interviews. The group commissioned the DVD and required a Black filmmaker, for the project. The DVD I used was a personal recording of the performance itself. The Doku DVD is still shown at Black History Month celebrations in Germany.

[116] Authors include: Sebastian Fleary, Patricia Goethe and Sharon Otoo. (along with Toan Nguyen, ManuEla Ritz, Joshua Aikins, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, Arun Singal, Siraad Wiedenroth, Amina Eisner, and Jonathan Aikins).

weekend workshops, methods, and inspiration behind the project. According to the self-produced "Dokubroschüre" and my interviews with Fleary, the YoungStars project and the play *real life: Deutschland* drew inspiration from radical theater theorist Augusto Boal and critical pedagogy theorist Paulo Freire. The Youngstars also incorporated Black female theorists such as bell hooks. The youth group incorporated intertextuality through use of multiple elements of the Black diaspora in the production including Sojourner Truth's "Aint I a Woman?" speech, Frederick Douglass' writings, May Ayim's poems "afro-deutsch I & II," Ayo's "Life is Real," and 1990s R&B group En Vogue's song "Hold On."

In this chapter, I will analyze the theories and people that the teens evoke in their play and the meaning behind it. I will show how the theater project makes use of these cultural products to advance the project's aims of empowerment through improvisation and performance. In a performance that includes dance, scripted acting, and improvisation, this empowerment has had lasting effects. Although the project no longer exists, the positive effects of it are seen through the lives of those involved. It is revolutionary in nature and its influence in the emerging genre of Afro-German theater, creating a basis in empowerment on stage and performing intersectional lives of Black Germans.

B. Empowerment through Improvisation

1. Freire

The play *real life: Deutschland* has its origins in weekend empowerment workshops. During these weekends, a teacher led a workshop on global oppression with

different foci at each meeting. The varied topics included: self-reflection on racism, learning about history of oppression in the world, dance theater making use of the film *Rhythm is it!* (2004), and improvisational theater.[117] The workshops were also collaborative. The teens improvised scenes based on what they learned in the workshop, becoming co-producers of knowledge. In this way, learning was not unidirectional, but dialogic.

Such a collaborative learning style derives from Brazilian critical pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire, whom the YoungStars reference in their "Dokubroschüre" among other sources.[118] This is not the first time Friere's ideas have been used internationally. There is a tradition of employing Freire's work in the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, and North America.[119] The application of his theories in the German context can be useful, as it has been for oppressed people across the globe. In the case of this chapter, I analyze its usefulness for Afro-German teenagers.

In his groundbreaking work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Freire defines the "pedagogy of the oppressed" as: "the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation."[120] This requires first the realization of one's oppression and then subsequent action to resist oppression. Freire does not reference racial oppression in

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[117] YoungStars, "Dokumentation des YoungStar Theater Projektes" (unpublished manuscript, 2008), 24-27.

[118] Ibid., 18.

[119] For further information, see the following books: Peter Kallaway, *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) and Prosper Godonoo, "Tribute to Paulo Freire-His Influence on Scholars in Africa," *Convergence*. 31, no.1-2 (1998): 30-39.
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[120] Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra B. Ramos (New York: Continuum International, 2003), 48, 53. Hereafter cited within the text.

particular, but instead examines multilayered, systemic oppression. He posits that oppression thrives on socialization without questioning. Freire contends that students need to be critical thinkers and that currently students are taught to be submissive and to memorize. His term for this type of education is the "banking system." In it, students do not think for themselves or draw their own conclusions and instead are taught what to believe and think. Freire explains: "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (72). This educational style impedes creativity so that the oppressors can maintain the status quo (73). For Freire, knowledge should not be passed from the teacher to the student; the student should not be considered an empty vessel to fill. This creates a dangerous power dynamic, which assumes the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing. When the student does not know anything, or is assumed to not know anything, the authority figure is elevated. This presents a problem because it reinforces oppression.

Instead, Freire suggests that teachers and students should learn together in what he calls "co-intentional education" (67). Freire explains: "The students — no longer docile listeners — are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (81). Education should exist as an exchange of ideas and inquiry for which both parties are responsible: students and teachers "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (80). As the "practice of freedom" (81), education is never finished, but instead a "process of becoming" (84). Freire's ideal is that learning occurs in community in an environment in which knowledge exchange can take place between people. Because of

the hierarchal classroom structure, students will likely be in a subjugated position and remain oppressed throughout their entire lives. In *real life: Deutschland,* the youths focus on power dynamics in the classroom as well as their Afro-German identities.

Importantly, the YoungStars developed a communal learning system, as Freire suggests. The style of learning is non-hierarchical and the teens and facilitator all taught each other so that no one person is in charge of distributing knowledge. This communal learning structure also informed the content of the YoungStars curriculum. In communal learning systems all knowledge is valued. Through their communal space of learning, the YoungStars were able to recognize how the normative hierarchal system (of teacher being the one with the knowledge, memorization, and lack of questioning) reproduces oppression. Like Friere, the YoungStars recognized that knowledge creation cannot be top down, and that there is a direct link between oppression and hierarchical teaching systems. Instead, non-hierarchal learning results in equity. They took ownership of their education through these weekend workshops to learn about oppressed people across the globe in order to liberate themselves from oppression, as reflected by white normativity in instruction in the classroom. Because the YoungStars did not learn about oppressed people in their classrooms, they recognized that the onus of equity is their responsibility.

Freire's theory of communal learning was an integral part of the YoungStars' project. While Fleary was in charge of the funding sources, grant writing and weekend organizing, the teenagers had artistic control of the project.[121] Everything from terminology (i.e., the term Afro-German found in the "Dokubroschüre"), to the decision to perform, where to perform, and what to perform was decided collectively by the

[121] Fleary, interview July 24, 2015.

teenagers. This is the co-production of knowledge Freire calls for: teaching one another, drawing connections that may have been otherwise unseen, and actively engaging teens in these processes early enough to not give the teacher more power, and instead to ideally question and actively, jointly produce knowledge in the future. The teens employed this intentional collaborative learning during the weekend workshops. This is a collaborative learning moment because learning does not come solely from the instructor, but equally from the students.

During the history of oppressed people workshop, the YoungStars watched the 2002 Australian film *Rabbit Proof Fence* about Aborigines. Based on a true story, the film depicts the attempt to "whiten" Aborigines (in other words, commit cultural genocide) by kidnapping the children from their families and intermarrying in order to eradicate them in Australia. In their improvisation, the youth divided into small groups in order to brainstorm ways to teach back to the group. The youth envisioned a completely reversed power dynamic to erase oppression. In doing so, they make this event in Australia more relevant for oppressed people in Europe.

One group, which included Amina Eisner (age 18), reversed this notion of whitening a population during their teach-back presentation. Instead of whitening Australia, her group proposed to Blacken Europe to rid them of the plague of their "sun sensitivities" and "pale unattractiveness." I will discuss the specifics of this scene at the end of this chapter. Here the relevance is the position of power as teens educate the teacher in the context of co-teaching. This gesture gives them power and the knowledge that they have something valuable to contribute. Freire's theories on multidirectional

education are shown here in a workshop based on collaborative improvisation that reverses a white model in order to show its absurdity and its origins.

2. Boal

The YoungStars also drew on the improvisation theories of Augusto Boal, a contemporary of Paulo Freire.[122] Performance Studies scholar Marvin Carlson said of Boal: "Probably no contemporary theorist has explored the political implications of the performance-audience relationship in so searching and original a manner."[123] Boal was a Brazilian theater theorist who worked on Improvisation Theater for lower classes to challenge upper classes in Brazil. Similar to Freire, Boal's theories are about empowerment from oppression and the oppressed classes liberating themselves. As the YoungStars are a collaborative improvisational youth group of untrained actors, Boal's theories are useful in our understanding of their performance. Using these improvised educational skits, the teens decided to create a full play by choosing the most memorable skits from the workshops. Under the guidance of Fleary, they constantly kept the audience and purpose behind the play in mind, making the process even more collaborative, thoughtful, reflective, and intentional.

Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (1985) is effective in thinking about empowerment and breaking through oppression. Boal has shown that improvisation helps imagine an alternative to the oppression and helps one react differently when oppressive situations occur. For him, theater is liberating:

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[122] YoungStars, "Dokumentation des YoungStar Theater Projektes," 40.

[123] Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theater* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 475.

> In this book [*Theater of the Oppressed*] I also offer some proof that the theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theater and utilize it as a tool for domination . . . But the theater can also be a weapon for liberation.[124]

Theater is a way to fight back against oppression. During the coups and instability in the 1960s in Brazil, Boal used theater to provide a space to imagine possibilities for peasants to combat their oppressors. While living in exile, he adapted his theater techniques for new spaces/countries.[125] Boal taught adults and youth alike how to improvise moments of oppression to break free from them, intending to bring social and political change. His type of forum theater is inherently radical, adding fluidity to traditional roles, as Boal explains: "In forum [theater], roles are not fixed—not only character but the roles of 'actor,' 'playwright,' and 'director.' So forum is radical in relation to dramaturgy."[126] Changing standard roles in theater to allow fluidity and collaboration, this type of theater is revolutionary and unlike theater traditions before it. It breaks the rigid roles of actor and spectator, allowing anything to happen. This loss of control over the play allows for the possibility for something brand new to develop.

Instead of watching passively, the teens in *real life: Deutschland* were what Boal calls "spect-actors" participating in the play. Boal essentially sees the possibility to overcome the alienation of the audience member through the agency of the spec-actor, as

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[124] Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1985), ix.

[125] Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, introduction to *A Boal Companion*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 3.

[126] Augusto Boal, Michael Taussig, and Richard Schechner, "Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: Interview," *TDR* 34, no. 3 (1990): 58, accessed June 16, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146069.

opposed to the passive spectator.[127] The typical spectator does nothing but consume, and thus Boal urges the spectator to become involved in the action of the play as a spect-actor. For Boal, the action of engaging an audience member as actor is more important than hoping for the viewer to draw an analogy or learn from the main character. Instead, the audience member participates as a subject instead of an object because s/he participates in the action of the performance.[128]

Instead of showing the apposite oppression of the working class as Brecht does in his theater, Boal's theories allow participants multiple trajectories. Boal explains: "It is not the place of the theater to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined."[129] Boalian theater allows imagination to work and creates a space for experimentation. While contemporary theater works in the indicative "I do," Boal believes actors should think the question, "What if I had done this?" and the future, "What if I were to do this?"[130] For Boal, the theater is the subjunctive (37).[131] Boal explains,

> [The subjunctive mood] is the comparison, discovery and counter position of possibilities, not of a single certainty set against another, which we have in reserve. It is the construction of diverse models of future action for a particular given situation, enabling their evaluation and study (40).[132]

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[127] Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 122.

[128] Ibid., 132.

[129] Ibid., 141.

[130] Augusto Boal, *An Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, trans. Adrian Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40. Hereafter cited in the text.

[131] Ibid., 37.

[132] Boal, *An Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 40.

This type of "improvising into being" theater relies on the oppressed classes coming together to imagine new and different possibilities for their world. This type of theater is liberating: "The spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself!"[133] Boal argues that contemporary stage theater is spectacle; the oppressed classes "do not know yet what their world will look like; consequently their theater will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle."[134] In his *Theater of the Oppressed*, the spectators are free to act, and the end remains unknown as they engage their agency to be protagonists.[135]

In Boal's experimental theater, one spect-actor recalls a moment of oppression and acts it out. Then s/he reenacts the moment(s) with alternative responses to oppression. Acting out options gives the spectators/actors the ability to see the actions they could take for change to occur: "This game of images offers many other possibilities. The important thing is always to analyze the feasibility of the change."[136] The actors enact the steps necessary to see the ideal image come to fruition.[137] This is not intended to be cathartic; instead, rehearsing various outcomes will give the participant practice for dealing with oppression in the future.[138]

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[133] Boal, "Theater as Discourse," in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (New York: Routledge, 2014), 98-99.

[134] Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 142.

[135] Boal, "Theater as Discourse," 88.

[136] Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 139.

[137] Ibid., 138.

[138] Boal, "Theater as Discourse," 94.

Boal's theories are particularly applicable to a youth group like the YoungStars. In his work with youth, Boal stressed the lack of available language and concepts. Youth do not have the language to express themselves as adults do. Boal explains, "Because the children, even if they learn a lot, they have a very limited vocabulary. And sometimes they don't articulate their thoughts well . . . But if you ask them in image, they are going to build their own vocabulary."[139] Children are better at expressing themselves through their bodies, which is exactly what this type of theater calls for. When working with children, it is important to know how to facilitate the activity in order to break down difficult terminology. Boal reveals, "When we work with young people, sometimes we don't even use the word oppression. Many times, they don't know what oppression is."[140] Working through the terminology together will open their eyes to the oppression around them and to ways to begin to liberate themselves from that oppression. To show them that they are oppressed as children before they (may) realize it on their own changes the dynamic of power from weakness and dependency to strength and empowerment.

3. Application of Boal in *real life: Deutschland*

In Boal, the YoungStars found someone whose outsider story resembled their own, and someone who resides outside of the predominantly white German canon, in order to give precedence to a theorist of color though their process-based project. It was their improvisation, their time as spect-actors, that were the most fruitful aspects of the project, and not the performance itself. I argue that even the public performance of the

[139] Peter Duffy, "The Human Art: An Interview on Theater of the Oppressed and Youth with Augusto Boal," in *Youth and Theater of the Oppressed*, ed. Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 252.

[140] Ibid., 258.

play was still meant for the youth in the end. Although they did perform for audiences, the performances were for the teens themselves. Because they performed largely in their hometowns, they performed in front of neighbors, relatives, peers, and friends. They did not profit from the performances; instead, their performances filled the gap of performance by Black youth. The improvisation benefited the actors and gave them a safe space to imagine alternatives to their daily life in Germany.

The initial improvisation during the weekend workshops fell under the following two categories: "Diskriminierung/Status und Emotionales Theater" [Discrimination/Status and Emotional Theater] and "Beobachtung, Bewegung mimen, Bewegung werden/Schwarz sein" [Observing, Mimicking movement/Becoming Movement/Black Consciousness] (21).[141] For the group, improvisation led to the creation of something new; the YoungStars write in the "Dokubroschüre": "Es geht dabei darum, gemeinsam in Bewegung zu kommen . . . gemeinsam etwas noch nie Dagewesenes zu kreieren. Auf der Bühne soll solche Geschehnisse entwickeln können, die wir im Leben nie zulassen würden" [It is about coming together in movement . . . to create something together that never existed before. On the stage such occurrences are supposed to develop that we wouldn't otherwise tolerate].[142] The process of creating together was then the focus, something they had not been allowed to do in their daily lives. These principles are seen in Boal's theories of using improvisation to imagine a change. Sharon Otoo, who was involved towards the end of the project, said that she learned that "the process was

[141] YoungStars, 21.

[142] YoungStars, 17.

more important" than the outcome.[143] The weekend workshops were also process-oriented instead of goal-oriented.

This focus on process relates directly back to Boal's ideas of improvisation. In Brazil, Boal focused on the lower classes and used improvisation to think through ways to confront their oppressors. Boal's theories of class oppression are also applicable to the racial oppression faced by the YoungStars. Improvisation and co-education contributed to the empowerment of the youth, which is what Boal and Freire were looking to promote. As evidenced in the "Dokubroshüre," empowerment was a necessary focal point of the project. The YoungStars explain the situation for People of Color in Germany:

> PoC stehen unter einem permanenten, ihre Identität betreffenden Legitimationszwang, der von der weißen Mehrheitsgesellschaft ausgeübt wird. Die Allgegenwärtigkeit von Rassismus und die ihm innewohnende Gewalt haben direkte Auswirkungen auf Selbstwertgefühl und die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung Schwarzer Menschen.[PoCs are under a permanent identity-related legitimization pressure that is executed by the white majority society. The ubiquity of racism and the inherent violence has a direct impact on the self-esteem and the personal development of Black people].[144]

Empowerment was key to the project because "Empowerment-Strategien wirken darauf hin, weiße, dominante Deutungshoheit zu schwächen bzw. zu brechen und alternative Deutungsräume und Lebensbezüge anzuregen. Diese sollen PoC befähigen, ihre Forderungen an die Dominanzgesellschaft nicht aus einer Position der Abhängigkeit heraus, sondern der Unabhängigkeit und Stärke, zu formulieren" [Empowerment strategies work in order to weaken and break white dominant authority and to stimulate alternative ways of thinking and ways to live. These [strategies] are supposed to empower

[143] Sharon Otoo, interview by Jamele Watkins, Berlin, July 9, 2014.

[144] YoungStars, 8.

PoCs to combat the dominant society not from a position of dependence, but instead from a position of independence and strength].[145] The goal of the performance was not to generate sympathy in the audience or to act out the experiences of Afro-Germans, but instead to give the audience a chance to reflect and think about the skits. The YoungStars are empowered through minimizing the significance of whiteness and by highlighting PoCs. The audience acts as a witness to a coming to consciousness moment of these Afro-German children. By the end of the project, the teens had a better idea of what was necessary to an empowerment project and they "came out as different people."[146]

Boal's interpretation of Brecht shows the utility of Boal for empowerment theater. While there are similarities between Boal's and Brecht's theories, there are also differences to consider. Brechtian plays and theories have been analyzed with completed plays and by professional actors. In the case of *real life: Deutschland*, we have neither a finished play, nor trained actors; in this sense, the play relies more on Boal than Brecht. Because Boal is a theorist of color from Brazil, his theories nicely fit into a framework for these teenagers as People of Color to understand the ways oppression affects their lives. The two theorists differ on the distinction between actor, audience member, and character. Boal finds Brecht's theories lacking because the spectator is not involved and may not change or think differently after the production. For Boal, Brechtian theory is lacking because he envisions a dissociated relationship between audience and stage. The audience member stays in the audience, and the actor remains on stage. Boal problematizes this because he sees the audience as not having to change or interact with a

[145] Ibid., 9.

[146] Sharon Otoo, interview by Jamele Watkins, Berlin, July 9, 2014.

play. Boal also criticizes Brecht for a dominating main character. Further, the Brechtian actor is supposed to think differently and distance himself from the character. Boal's actor, character, and audience member are the same. Boal's symbiotic relationship between audience and actor is necessary for empowerment. Boal explains:

> Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think of himself, often in opposition to the character . . . But *the poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change—in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action [italics in original].[147]

Many theater scholars have recently discussed the legacy of Brecht's *Lehrstück* and the legacy of it. Theater practitioner and scholar Andrzej Wirth explains Brecht's utopian idea:[148] "Brecht's theory of the *Lehrstück* is more radical than what was practiced in the productions of his lifetime, involving strategic and cultural compromises" (115). There are similarities between Brecht's *Lehrstück* and Boal's theory of improvisation. Wirth explains that Brecht's theory was for the actors themselves to remain thinking, but not necessarily for the audience to remain thinking: "The way the *Lehrstück* was performed during Brecht's lifetime stood in contradiction to the radicality of its theory, which emphasizes a sharp contrast between the *Schaustück* (a play for the benefit of the audience) and the *Lehrstück* (for the benefit of the players)" (116). Wirth raises the

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[147] Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 122.

[148] Andrzej Wirth, "The Lehrstück as Performance" *TDR* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 113. Hereafter cited in text.

question, what is the purpose of the *Lehrstück*? Is it meant for political purposes or "as formal exercises in the art of the dialectic?" (113). Similarly, Florian Vaßen speaks to the complicated nature of Brecht's dialectic in the *Lehrstück* (Vaßen 208). He explains the impossibility of the *Lehrstück*, despite Steinweg's work on it: "Die 'reine Lehre' des Lehrstücks gibt es nicht mehr und hat es sicherlich nie gegeben, selbst bei Steinweg nicht, der in seinen frühen Untersuchungen den Versuch unternahm, Brechts Lehrstücktheorie zu rekonstruieren."[149] Finally, Germanist David Pan affirms the idea that Brecht wanted to promote critical thinking with his *Lehrstück*.[150] However, Pan also acknowledges the difficulty of Brecht's project, calling it a failure.[151]

Within the YoungStars' project and eventual performances, it is important to emphasize Boal's theories over Brecht's. As performance scholar Philip Auslander explains, Brecht and Boal differ in ideology.[152] Brecht is more concerned with consequences of a character's behavior. Auslander explains that Brecht uses the gestus to

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[149] Florian Vaßen, "'Jede sollte sich von sich selbst entfernen'--Fremdheit und Verfremdung bei Bertolt Brecht," *Brecht Yearbook/Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 37 (2012): 209.

[150] David Pan, "Sacrifice as Political Representation in Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke*," *Germanic Review* 84, no. 3 (2009): 222-250. "But this ambitious project of fundamentally transforming the behavior of political subjects . . . from empathetic spectator ship to thinking participant was, as we know, a failure (224)." See also Rainer Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-äesthetischen Erziehung* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1972), 87-93.

[151] Pan 224. "But this ambitious project of fundamentally transforming the behavior of political subjects . . . from empathetic spectator ship to thinking participant was, as we know, a failure."

[152] Philip Auslander, "Boal, Blau, Brecht: The Body," in *From Acting to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 104.

criticize social implications from an ideological standpoint.[153] On the other hand, Boal uses the theater to experiment with different possibilities, instead of for a sole political resolution (104). Auslander further believes that Boal's spect-actor is not gestic, but instead presents an opportunity "for particular ideological regimens to try on others for size" (105). Boal takes Brecht's ideology one step further from the theater to everyday practice. Auslander illuminates:

> To a certain extent, Boal reverses the relationship between social experience and theater posited by Brecht. Whereas, for Brecht, social experience should inform, and can be conveyed by, theater, for Boal, performance is a way of exploring options which must then be tested in real life (105).

Boal does something different than Brecht and his ideas are most important to the YoungStars' performance. Theater is not the be all end all for Boal. For Boal, theater is a means to an end; theater is part of a larger process of exploration. He uses the theater to initiate change in society, without claiming to have any of the answers (104). Typically, the emphasis of the play is in the performance, but instead Boal's theory suggests that theater is practice for real life experiences. Theater is then less effective for Boal than in Brecht's vision (105). Auslander explains: "This perception of theater's limited efficacy as social action distinguishes Boal from Brecht, and, most especially, from his more immediate predecessors . . ." (105). In his article "Activist Theater: From Brecht to Boal," Steven K. Smith does see Brecht's influence in Boal's work, but explains their differences also in terms of impact. Smith first criticizes Boalian theater for focusing too

[153] Auslander, 105. Hereafter cited in text.

much on the individual.[154] Another difference in their theories, Smith notes, is that Brecht favors "showing/teaching over participation," and for Boal, participation is key (288). Smith explains that Boal was most interested in "democratizing space" in his theater theories (291-92). Towards the end of his article, Smith concludes, "While Boal appears to be redefining the very concept of theater, Brecht frequently reiterated that his theory was not a substitution, but a supplement [to different theater practices]" (293). The difference in individual versus collective rings true for the members of the YoungStars as they transform as individuals in a white mainstream society.

I do not claim that the YoungStars' production will result in an overthrow of white supremacy as a result of the revolution that Boal calls for, but I do believe that the teens do something revolutionary in their intervention on stage. However, the local and the global revolution are not easily interchangeable. Jane Milling and Graham Ley explain, "From its inception, the theater of the oppressed confronts a local analysis which does not accommodate itself with ease to the ambitions of the revolutionary and Marxist frame in which it is offered to the participants."[155] Essentially, Milling and Ley argue that Boal's theory will not lend itself to a large-scale revolution. Further, Milling and Ley critique Boal for the unlikelihood of inciting the ground-breaking revolution Marx longs for in his *Das Kapital*. Certainly, the revolution for the oppressed lower classes is not applicable to everyone everywhere. As I have also stated above, Auslander has shown that Boalian

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[154] Steven K. Smith, "Activist Theater: From Brecht to Boal," in *Brecht Yearbook* 30, ed. Stephen Brockmann (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 286. Hereafter cited in text.

[155] Jane Milling and Graham Ley, *Modern Theories of Performance: From Stanislavski to Boal* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 167.

theater is instead "a lab of social experimentation."[156] I argue that the YoungStars project is indeed revolutionary, if we narrow our definition of the term to the individual level. What is revolutionary will look differently according to each person, and each local situation will also be different.

Premised on a Marxist model, Brecht's theory cannot really respond to the specific and local (and individual) situations in which theatrical performances take place and does not account for individual revolutions that may look different. Boal's theories do something different; his idea of revolution, initially based on specific circumstances in Brazil, changed and became applicable to other places, as referenced earlier. The YoungStars took Boal's theory and supplemented it with Black theorists and artists from around the globe to make their realities visible to German audiences. Of course, *real life: Deutschland* will not (and did not) overthrow white supremacy and normativity in Germany. However, with the successful run of this piece in multiple cities in Germany, the play deserves recognition as the first theater performance of Afro-German identities.[157] Further, it is remarkable that children and teens performed the very first public all Afro-German theater production in Germany. I will spend the rest of the chapter discussing the ways in which this performance was revolutionary in its own right.

[156] Auslander, 104.

[157] While the play *Sankofa* was performed at the Bundestreffen, *real life: Deutschland* is the first staged play featuring Afro/Black Germans that was performed in multiple cities in Germany. *Kosmos BRD* was performed by teens in 2008 in Munich, but toured mostly neighboring schools. Another performance, *Colored Children* (1997) was a rap-dance performance by Afro-German teenagers (and not a drama).

C. Performance as Empowerment

Performing the play primarily for themselves permitted the YoungStars space for self-portrayal. Performance formed part of a process to find strength and independence in a majority white society. Thematically, it referenced their experiences in childhood. The play focuses on various child and youth experiences in the classroom, on the playground, and inside the *Diskothek* as a Black teenager. The play materializes tensions within power relationships. In one vignette, for example, the performers act out a scene from a classroom, when a teacher uses inappropriate language to describe Black people in a lesson. The students gently suggest different terminology, showing the audience that, in spite of power dynamics—especially considering the teachers' control over one's future in the German school system—it is possible to confront those in power on problematic usages of language in the classroom. In another instance, an actor playing a child on the playground is called an N-word, and she asks her father, played by another teen, what that means. This scene performs the processing involved for children receiving the term. In this scene, the child doesn't understand the definition, but understands that it is negative. The parent explains that people still use the N-word regardless of socio-cultural changes over time. This scene is relatable for Black people across the diaspora and thus produces empathy in Black audience members. These cathartic scenes validate the experiences of Black people in Germany. This also brings awareness to white audience members who may not know that their family members and friends are still called such hurtful words.

For the YoungStars, the key to recovering Black German identity is through performance.[158] As mentioned above, other examples of breaking out of oppression do not exist for the teens. As bell hooks—another key theorist for the YoungStars—explains, "We are called upon to constantly create our models."[159] In her chapter "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in *Yearning*, hooks describes that survival is based on improvisation:

> Those of us who live, who "make it," passionately holding on to aspects of that "downhome" life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised.[160]

The type of improvisation hooks refers to here is not necessarily a type of theater improvisation; however, we could draw the same conclusions for the stage. In *real life: Deutschland*, there is literal improvisation and performance. The "inventive space of openness" for the teens was on stage. Performance is an aesthetic space and a transformative space, which they have reclaimed through creative expression. hooks explains:

> This site of resistance [the margin] is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative

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[158] "Identity is not just who other people say you are, but also who you say you are." Tiffany Florvil, Black German Studies Seminar, GSA Kansas City, MO, September 21, 2014.

[159] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2.

[160] hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in *Yearning* (Boston: South End, 1990), 149.

> space, which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.[161]

The stage can also symbolize a marginal space; the teens use it to relay their real life experiences. This use of the stage means that theater is then a space in which to work collectively and productively and to create acts that reflect one's experiences and subjectivity in Germany. The performance reflects moments of injustice and, more importantly, allows space to make sense of oneself in relation to the world. Specifically, there are injustices that are often overlooked in our society: injustices women and PoCs in particular experience daily.

real life: Deutschland takes up what it means to be a racialized and gendered individual in German society who experiences daily injustices. bell hooks' theories help to explain how the YoungStars performed Black female identities and what they accomplished by doing so. They evoke her ideas in their "Dokubröschure."[162] In thinking of oppression and racial and gendered power, bell hooks' 1990 book of essays entitled *Yearning* examines complexities of race and gender in everyday society. hooks' theory of "eating the other" describes the way in which People of Color are appropriated in white mainstream society. In bell hook's *Black Looks* (1992), she discusses consumption of Black culture by white society. She explains:

> When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.[163]

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[161] Ibid., 153.

[162] YoungStars, 50.

[163] bell hooks, *Black Looks,* 23.

Taking an intersectional[164] approach, *real life: Deutschland* rejects commodification. In a scene set at a *Diskothek*, the teens focus on the commodification of Black women's bodies. The girls in the scene reject exploitation through dancing for themselves (in little to no lighting), and through depicting the harassment women endure, including being in a potentially dangerous situation at a nightclub with a drunk man. Denying pleasure to anyone but themselves, they reject being taken over by white society through these acts. They highlight experiences teenagers and women experience. They occupy a particularly tough position because as teenaged girls (16+), they are allowed to go to the *Diskothek*, but experience gendered and age oppression, as they are much younger than the men at the club. Performing these daily encounters and refusing their commodification empowers the girls in the YoungStars.

In *real life: Deutschland*, the teens act in a power battle within the space of their *Heimat*, or home, Germany. Using the nation to symbolize home draws hook's theory further into dialogue with the YoungStars' play. In *Yearning*, in the chapter "Homeplace," hooks explains how Black women have reclaimed the home space. The idea of making home a safe space and engaging in power battles within the home offers a chance for the teens to critique the systematic racism in Germany. hooks describes dynamics of tension within the homeplace: "I want to speak about the importance of homeplace in the midst of opposition and domination, of homeplace as a site of resistance

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[164] By intersectional, I mean considering the ways race, gender, class, and ability impact the experiences of an individual. In particular, the YoungStars deal with race, gender, and age. By doing this, they address the oppression unique to children and teenagers.

and liberation struggle."[165] In their play the teens present Germany as a nation as a place of resistance and liberation struggle. As Black teens, they are constantly subjugated based on both their age and their color. Parents, teachers, public authority figures, and others in their lives can tell them they are wrong, that they are being too sensitive, or that racism is all in their heads. Refuting these dismissals in *real life: Deutschland*, the performance forms part of their liberation struggle. hooks also quotes Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh: "I think that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness."[166] I contend that the performances were intended to resist authority figures in their lives. Performing moments of oppression through improvisation gave these teens the opportunity to recover themselves and to claim their identities on stage in a public space and in their home nation, Germany.

As referenced in the introduction, Afro-German children do not have many Black role models because there is a disconnect between mainstream white German culture and the contemporary multicultural society in which Germans, including those with hyphenated identities, live. *real life: Deutschland* incorporates multiple pieces of iconography and diasporic ideas into the play. Below, I will describe the play as it unfolds chronologically on stage and analyze it with particular attention to the diasporic iconography that the teens and children evoke.

1. The Performance of *real life: Deutschland*

[165] hooks, "Homeplace," in *Yearning*, 43.

[166] Ibid.

The performance of *real life: Deutschland* utilizes elements of the African diaspora in order to make sense of Afro-German life in Germany. Afro-German artists, part of the diaspora themselves, also utilize the diaspora in their artistic work through symbols, language, and video locations. Analogously, there are many instances of the diaspora present in the production of the YoungStars project, and likewise they use intertextuality through Brown's notion of diasporic iconography. The play begins with artists who evoke the diaspora in their work. After Fleary gives a brief introduction and acknowledgements, the audience hears Afro-German singer and songwriter Ayo's song "Life is Real" (2006) on an empty stage. The music video was filmed in the diaspora, in Lagos, and the song is in English, one of the many colonial languages. [167] Ayo describes her style as a blend of seemingly oppositional genres: reggae-folk. Ayo's acoustic guitar riffs complement the song's intimate and raw themes: "Some people say/I'm too open/ they say/ it's not good to let them know everything about me." Ayo refuses this standpoint in her chorus, allowing her authenticity to come through in her daily life: "I live my life/ the way I want/ I've got nothing to hide, nothing at all/ Life is not a fairy tale/ they should know that/ Life is real." Ayo refuses to "just keep quiet," as she says in her song, and in a similar way, the teenagers refuse to "just keep quiet" about their experiences in Germany. By doing so, they take a risk. Hiding also means not being real, that is, to put on a charade.

After hearing Ayo's "Life is Real," the cast reads noted Afro-German and spoken word performer May Ayim's poems "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II," from her

[167] Michel Martin, "Soul Singer Has 'Nothing to Hide': Interview with Ayo Ogunmakin," *NPR*, January 15, 2008, http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=18108464.

collection *Blues in schwarz weiß* (1996). Ayim is celebrated as one of the trailblazers of the Afro-German literary movement; the inclusion of Ayim highlights the work of Afro-Germans who came before them. Among the multitude of themes in her poetry, Ayim evokes the African diaspora. Dirk Göttsche emphasizes Karein Goertz's analyses of Ayim's poetry: "Karein Goertz has drawn attention to two important sources of inspiration in Ayim's poetry, the African-American blues and Asante art."[168] The analysis of Adinkra symbols as literature also evokes Ghanaian culture. Goertz explains further the African-American influence in her poetry style: "Using metaphorical language to persuade, ridicule, parody or provoke her readers, Ayim references the double-voiced signifying practices that are central to the African-American literary tradition."[169] Goertz calls her poetry both diasporic and political, and she highlights the way Ayim places white German readers on the margins:

> She makes few concessions to explicate cultural references that may be unfamiliar to the German readers to decode their deeper meaning. By integrating these non-Western references into her German-language text, Ayim turns the tables on her German readers: she marginalizes them in the context of familiar language and confronts them with unfamiliar signifying practices.[170]

This marginalization of white German readers reflects the marginalization Ayim experiences and performs in her poems, "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II." This poem speaks to the YoungStars' teenaged experiences in Germany as Afro-Germans. Parts of the poem note the "interesting combination" of Afro-German identity. Ayim's

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[168] Göttsche, 94; Karein Goertz, "Showing Her Colors," Callaloo 26, no. 2 (2003), 307, 314.

[169] Goertz, 307.

[170] Ibid.

poems address the slippage in identity and the racism she encounters using a white German voice.

The Afro-German voice is absent in German culture. Ayim's poem shows how through slippage in Afro-German identity to African identity is constantly reduced. As Wright explains, "The dialogue-as-monologue Ayim constructs through these poems also highlights the insistent misreading and redefinition that operates in the German imagination; the Afro-German is consistently and stubbornly recast as an African."[171] "Afro-deutsch" is a conversation between a white German and an Afro-German in which we only hear the white German side of the conversation. Wright goes on to explain the absence of the Afro-German voice as a metaphor:

> Afro-German I's simulated "conversation" quietly reveals that the Afro-German subject has never really been allowed to speak in the first place. Indeed, on the first reading it appears that she has been denied her agency altogether; yet by placing the focus on the white German's discourse, Ayim highlights how that discourse elides an obvious reality (the Afro-German), so that it may retreat into a fantasy of colonialist binaries where all the Germans are white, and all the Blacks are African primitives.[172]

The poem puts into words what it means to be excluded from your home because of skin color and the racism the children face daily. The speaker tells the young Afro-German woman that she can "go back," that is, back to where she came from in order to "bring order" to the home of her Papa. The speaker assumes that her mother is white German, and that her father is Black (not German and from somewhere full of unrest). The white German is also surprised that the Afro-German wants to stay in Germany—a place she does not belong. Considering the multiple backgrounds of Afro-Germans, these

[171] Wright, "Others-From-Within From Without," 299.

[172] Ibid., 301.

assumptions often have little to do with reality. Afro-German backgrounds are remarkably varied.

In *real life: Deutschland*, the teens read the poem intertwined with a similar dialogue on stage. In doing so they recreate conversations they have as teenagers, show how things have stayed more or less the same, and contribute to an emerging self-expressive literary corpus. During public performances, the teenager who reads Ayim's poem could not make the performances because she was studying abroad. The teens had the idea to record her reading the poem so that she could still be part of the performance although she was not physically there. Her recorded reading enabled her to be part of the process. To close the scene, the teens backstage end the poem themselves instead of relying on Ayim, and yell, "Um mich schliesslich weiß machen zu wollen!" [In order to want to make me white]. With this last statement at the beginning of the play, the children reject the notion that they desire to be white and reject people who try to make them white; they take pride in their history of literary mothers, and they take pride in their Black identity.

2. Reclaiming Black Bodies

Following the above rejection of white identity, the play moves next in the performance timeline to empower Black female subjectivity, reclaiming the Black female body. In two short skits, a few girls dance, covered with a sheet, as the other characters "ohhh" and "ahhh," imitating the voyeurism of a white German audience. Tina Campt describes this exoticism Women of Color experience: "In contemporary Germany, this Eurocentric notion of beauty rejects women of color as 'other,' while paradoxically

giving positive value to 'otherness' as 'exotic,' and thus exterior to this ideal."[173] Then, in the play, they break free and release themselves from the thoughts and opinions of the German public by literally shaking off the sheet that covers them to reclaim their bodies for themselves.[174]

Young women continue to reclaim their bodies in the play, and continue to use intertextuality with an African-American 1990s hit. Initially, two girls dance slowly on top of boxes (similar to go-go dancers) to the first 1:05 seconds of En Vogue's song "Hold On." The song was released in 1992 on the album *Funky Divas*. This talented group is known for its style, class, simplicity, matching dresses, choreographed moves, and harmonizing a cappella. The beginning of the song "Hold On" is markedly different than the rest of the song. Without the beat, the first minute is a cappella and resembles poetry: "When I had you/I treated you bad/oh my dear, but since/since you went away/don't you know I/ sit around with my head hanging down/and I wonder/who's lovin' you." Examining the lyrics reveals that the song is about regret, love and desire. This scene takes a strong stance against the exoticism and eroticism that Black women face in Germany. As previously mentioned, society labels Black female identity as exotic and sexual.[175] During the song, two female teens improvise a dance in darkness on a podium with a light only at their ankles and feet. This takes away the possible chances for voyeurism and consuming the Black female body on stage for audiences. Instead, they

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[173] Tina Campt, "Afro-German Cultural Identity and the Politics of Positionality: Contests of a German Ethnic Identity," *New German Critique* 58 (1993): 120.

[174] Otoo.

[175] Campt, "Afro-German Cultural Identity," 120.

dance for themselves. With their dance, they thwart audience expectations of a go-go dancer. Reclaiming the stage space and movement, they have freedom to enjoy the song and dance as they choose, denying the voyeurism and white male gaze involved in spectatorship.

There were heated debates regarding the second scene, in which a drunken white German man, Gregor (played by actor Jonathan Aikins), approaches an Afro-German teen (whose friend went to the bathroom), saying, "Those hips-wünderschön." The teens wanted not only to show the reality of Afro-German young women, but they also wanted the audience to think critically about the power dynamics involved in the scene.[176] Otoo explains, "Because it was so extremely funny, it focused too much on Jonathan and not the experience of the girls."[177] To include the audience, the actors stop the performance, and another actor dressed in black comes on stage and asks the audience what they think might happen next ("Was könnte passieren?"). Then she waits for the audience to actually come up with answers for a few minutes, and after the audience shouts out three or four answers, she continues, "Sehen wir mal wie es weitergeht" [let's see how this continues]. Otoo describes this scene as empowering, as "it brings forth the perspective of the behavior of white men. When they are in that position, they are in a position of power. I think that scene was successful for turning around the power dynamic."[178] This nightclub scene foregrounds the Black girl's experience rather than the white German

[176] Otoo.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

man's experience.[179] The previous scenes (of voyeurism and dancing on the boxes on stage) also made the Black teens' dancing as more important than dancing for an audience. In both of these cases, these scenes reclaim the Black female body.[180]

In another connection to the diaspora, the teens also reclaim their body with the encouragement of Sharon Otoo who plays Sojourner Truth. In the next scene, the abolitionist visits the same actress from the *Diskothek*, saying, "Du hast selbst gelitten." According to their brochure, the YoungStars were inspired by Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech, in which Truth spoke about her intersectional identity as a Black woman in the nineteenth century. Given the exclusionary aspects of white women's movements historically, this speech is relevant here because it highlights the complexity of being a woman, and more specifically, what it means to be a Black woman in a majority white, patriarchal society. Instead of just reading Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, the teens opt to have Sojourner Truth transform time and space to visit this teen and offer her confidence. Sitting on the steps of the stage, the two talk. She reassures the girl: "Du bist stark, Schwarz, und schön."[181] The idea that a woman in Germany is strong, Black, and beautiful is revolutionary; the teens celebrate themselves in a culture and society that denies their existence, let alone their beauty. bell hooks explains,

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[179] At the end of the play, there is a caption about Gregor (the drunk from the *Diskothek*): "Gregor (der Typ aus der Disko) liegt mit gebrochener Nase im Krankenhaus. Eine Frau hatte ihm gegenüber diesmal eine klare Grenze gesetzt [Gregor –the guy from the club- lies in the hospital with a broken nose. A woman had made appropriate boundaries very clear to him] (*real life: Deutschland* DVD)." This shows that although the Black teen did not (and could not as a teenager) do anything to Gregor, the audience can rest assured that he was punished for his actions, albeit in a comedic way.

[180] Otoo.

[181] *real life: Deutschland*, directed by Sebastian Fleary, DVD.

"Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life."[182]

Similarly, there is tension for Black/Afro-Germans surrounding national identity. Historian Tina Campt explains that "the choice imposed upon Afro-Germans is less between 'black' and 'white' than between 'Black' and 'German'—a choice between claiming either their Black ethnicity or their German national and cultural heritage, each exclusive of one another."[183] The teens challenge this expectation and instead explain they are *both* Black *and* German, and they acknowledge the entanglement this brings. The teens run on stage one by one to exclaim their identity with one sentence, often complicating traditional notions of identity: "Ich bin Deutsche-ich liebe klassische Musik, ich liebe Milchreis mit ganz viel Zucker, ich liebe Mathematik, ich bin Deutsche, ich bin stark, Schwarz und schön, ich habe Verantwortung auf neue Generationen . . . "[184] Not only do the teens proclaim their pride in their Afro-German identities, they also realize their role in helping future generations of Afro-German youth who are going to need them for understanding their identity against a majority white German society.

3. Credits

After a hip-hop scene featuring three youths break dancing in a circle, the play ends on another intertextual diaspora note with Aretha Franklin's 1967 empowerment anthem "Respect." The credits roll with each child's name along with her/his character's

[182] hooks, *Black Looks,* 20.

[183] Campt, "Afro-German Cultural Identity," 113.

[184] *real life: Deutschland,* DVD.

name. Below the credits, a caption adds a sentence about her/his character's future. These captions feature the teens individually, providing literal time and space for them. Their imagined futures are bright and promise success. With these imagined successful futures, they add an alternative portrayal of Black people in German society. In addition, they offer themselves as role models for the other children in the audience.

The YoungStars used their marginalized position as Black youth to make space for non-white theorists, artists and authors on a German stage. By highlighting Black identity, they gave others ideas for how to have constructive discussions around race in the classroom or with a parent. At the same time, the group does not attempt to answer all questions; there is no answer for the problem girls face in nightclubs. Instead, they rely on the expectation that one day that man will get what he deserves. Perhaps the answer is that it is our responsibility as an audience to find an answer.

D. Reception

In addition to the many empowering aspects of the play itself, in many performances the reception of *real life: Deutschland* also furthered the YoungStars' objectives. There is a lack of reviews for this play in particular, but I was able to find something from the blog AfroEurope. That site describes the play: "In the theater play 'Real Life: Deutschland,' young boys and girls give their views on everyday situations which you can experience as member of a minority in Germany. The play Real Life Deutschland [sic] will shock and impress at the same time."[185] Fleary explains the feedback he received as the director of the project, "After each performance, mostly Black and PoC came to me and gave their

[185] "Black German Youth Theater-Real life Deutschland," *AfroEurope*, April 25, 2009, http://afroeurope.blogspot.com/2009/04/black-german-youth-theatre-real-life.html.

thanks . . . This [project] had a meaning for them."[186] Sharon Otoo called the play "cathartic" for Afro-German audiences. White Germans in the audience, on the other hand, criticized certain scenes of *real life: Deutschland*, many calling it too extreme.[187] According to interviews with Fleary and Otoo, the race of the audience members impacted the reception of the play. The Leipzig performance was particularly difficult, and the discussion period afterwards was not productive.[188]

The most controversial skit was "Die Afrikanisierung Europas." During the skit, one group, which included Amina Eisner, reversed this notion of whitening a population inspired by the earlier mentioned Australian film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Acting as scientists, the actors took questions from the audience; they could not break character and were forced to improvise with the audience. During the Cologne performance recording I watched, some audience members asked, "What if the white people don't want to participate and marry Africans?" As an answer, the actors laughed, responding, "That is ridiculous; why wouldn't they want to participate? We are helping them!"[189] From personal interviews I completed, the interviewees recollect a negative reaction from "many" white German audience members, who called it "too extreme" and "exaggerated."[190] Fleary recollects that audience members said things including, "That is racist! You could have made that point more gentle!" He explains their hostile reactions

[186] Fleary, interview, July 24, 2014.

[187] Fleary, interview, July 9, 2014.

[188] Otoo, interview.

[189] *real life: Deutschland*, DVD.

[190] Fleary, interview, July 24, 2014.

thusly: “if you confront people with white privilege on that level, [you are] putting them into these shoes they are not [used to being] in and maybe cannot even imagine what it is like or what it feels like.”[191]

According to Fleary, another audience member criticized the skit essentially for being too radical.[192] Evaluating these responses, the performers concluded this skit in particular made white audience members uncomfortable. Cultural and rhetoric theorist Kim Singletary offered a theory for the discomfort during a Black German GSA seminar, “Inside the play you realize your complicity or silence you’ve allowed to happen.”[193] This complicity is shown also through laughter. Otoo also explains the problem with this type of laughter and links it to self-realization: “Realization that I should not be laughing.”[194] Given these reactions, I conclude that this sort of laughter brings knowledge and awareness that, perhaps what they are witnessing is not acceptable. The laughter shows the absurdity of the actions on stage. The play put into action the horrors Black children in Germany experience on a daily basis.

E. Following the Project

The *real life: Deutschland* project ended in 2008, but its influence did not end. Both Fleary and Otoo commented that Black audience members were thankful for the play and their work on it. Amina Eisner (aged 18), one of the teenagers involved, studied

[191] Ibid.

[192] Fleary, interview, July 9, 2014.

[193] Kim Singletary, Black German Studies Seminar, GSA Kansas City, MO, September 21, 2014.

[194] Sharon Otoo, Black German Studies Seminar, GSA Kansas City, MO September 21, 2014.

in Liverpool and wrote her thesis on theater after the YoungStars project ended. Currently, Eisner's play, *Jung, Schwarz und Giftig*, a twist on Nina Simone's "To be Young, Gifted, and Black," is part of the repertoire at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse.[195] Reflecting on the YoungStars project, Eisner explains that she enjoyed the time it took to create; there was no pressure, and they were really able to develop scenes and experiment with them. Sebastian Fleary realized he wanted to participate in a program similar to *real life: Deutschland,* and he was involved with creating LiberatioNoir, now known as Label Noir. He also enjoyed working with people over a longer period of time.[196] Fleary learned that he wanted a career as an "Empowerment Begleiter."[197]

F. Conclusion

It is imperative to examine the beginnings of Afro-German performance groups and projects, as the past informs us how the present Afro-German theater is performed by providing the experiences upon which it is built. Specifically, the project *real life: Deutschland* explored improvisation, promoted empowerment, and encouraged collaboration. It was the beginning of Black/Afro-German theater in Germany as a new form of artistic expression and established the stage as a space for performing oppression and imagining change. Calling yourself "Schwarz, stark, und schön" on stage in contemporary Germany was and still is a revolutionary act. The teens in the YoungStars took a proactive and informed approach to their theater to perform an activist improvised play. They remained process-oriented instead of performance-oriented. *real life:*

[195] Past performances include May 2015 and November 2015.

[196] Fleary, interview July 24, 2014.

[197] Ibid.

Deutschland was essentially a spark of the revolution that Boal and Freire called for. Further, the teens show the limits of leftist theater theories, such as Brecht's, and point to the productive potential through incorporating African American and Latin American theorists. With these "diasporic relations" (Brown), the YoungStars searched outside and inside Germany for role models and theorists. Additionally, the teens referenced multiple Black women who refused tokenism and objectification in their own works, while referring to how they experience racism as teenagers. While the YoungStars did not overthrow regimes or start a revolution, they rejected the exclusive whiteness of German cultural identity. Actors from this play are still engaged in the Black German community, perform in other theater groups, and work with Black German youth. In the next three chapters, I will discuss the ways in which subsequent theater productions take up similar issues of empowerment, diaspora and intersectionality that the YoungStars began. Through the YoungStars, audiences witnessed racial and gender issues addressed on stage. With their work as a basis, the later productions showed a continuation of empowering artistic expression by Black Germans.

CHAPTER III

WHEN HOME IS BITTERSWEET: *Heimat, bittersüße, Heimat* (2010)

"Heimat heißt: erkannt zu werden
auch wenn man nicht will
Heimat heißt: dazugehören
lauthals oder still
Heimat: das kann überall sein
da und hier und dort

und wo immer Du auch sein wirst
ist mein Heimatort . . ."

"Heimat, letzter Versuch" by Lara Milagro, Act 5

A. Introduction

The play *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* (2010) [Home, bittersweet home] was written by Lara-Sophie Milagro and co-directed by Milagro and actress Vanessa Rottenburg. This play is important because it is the first Afro-German performance (possibly the first play written by an Afro-German playwright) by professional actors and actresses,[198] in a group called Label Noir. Milagro is an actress and playwright who was educated in England and performs in Germany, France, and the United States. Label Noir came into being because Sebastian Fleary, who directed *real life: Deutschland* with young people, wanted a similar improvisation group for Afro-German adults. Jonathan Aikins, an actor from the YoungStars, helped form the group. Founded in 2007 as LiberatioNoir by performer and media artist Aicha Diallo, the group chose a name rooted in their Afro-German and thespian identities: the term "Noir" represents Afro-Germans and provides

[198] Abok was an Afro-German acting group in the 1990s but only did "Szenische Lesungen."

new perspectives for the audience, particularly, a Black perspective. The word "Label" stands for artistic quality of the acting.[199] The group collaboratively developed improvisations and new skits. The origins of the play are thus similar to *real life: Deutschland*, discussed in the previous chapter; but, unlike *real life: Deutschland*, *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* eventually evolved into a scripted play in five acts. It premiered in Bielefeld thanks to a major financial contribution from a private donor from that city. The performance was controversial, and therefore the actors needed police protection from right-wing groups.[200] This play is not often performed anymore; Label Noir has moved on to other projects, similar to the YoungStars who performed *real life: Deutschland*. Since *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*, Label Noir has gone on to perform *Die Unerhörten* [The unmentionables] by Bruce Norris and their own piece *Satoe—gesegnete Heimat* [Satoe—blessed home].

Heimat, bittersüße Heimat thematizes being simultaneously Black and German in daily life in Germany. The theater group performs different interactions on stage involving Germanness or Black Germanness alongside white Germanness. Label Noir uses humor to approach themes of racism and the *Volk*, in order to illustrate how exclusionary German society was and continues to be. Like *real life: Deutschland*, this play features multiple, loosely related vignettes. The play begins with discussions about race and the false expectations of white Germans. In the first act, two actors on stage banter back and forth portraying problematic situations. The first scene features an Afro-

[199] "'Label' bezeichnet ein Gütesiegel, welches für hohe inhaltliche und schauspielerische Qualität der vom Ensemble dargebotenen Theaterkunst steht." Label Noir, December 2014, http://www.labelnoir.net.

[200] Lara-Sophie Milagro, email message to author, September 16, 2014.

German girl and an older white German woman who treats her like a foreigner. Then, a hippie meets an Afro-German woman at the bus stop and exoticizes her. Finally, it is two women in dialogue on stage who think they are progressive, but express problematic viewpoints towards "multikulti Deutschland."

The actors in the play then attempt to initiate change literally, by focusing on the street name Mohrenstraße. This street and subway station "Moor Street" is offensive because it triggers memories of Germany's racist past, and actors write in to Berlin Mitte to petition for the change. At the end of the play, the street sign is physically removed to reveal another name, Königin-von-Saba-Straße [Queen of Sheba Street], reflecting the need to change the many colonial street names in Germany. However, the actors also show that change is part of a multi-step process, which involves different parts of a larger process.

Finally, as the play progresses, the actors address themes of love and belonging. In one scene, an actor tries to buy love. Later, in a scene featuring romantic relationships (including two queer relationships), the couples argue and constantly misunderstand each other. This shift is less about race and conversations about problematic issues surrounding race and instead addresses personal relationships. However, the fact that color becomes more insignificant as the play progresses does not necessarily mean that the actors claim this moment as post-racial or post-racist. In this chapter, I read these instances as acts of misunderstanding: misunderstandings within the Afro-German community and beyond. I argue that this play empowers as it attempts to recover *Heimat* [home] on the German stage for Black people in Germany. There is empowerment through lifting up the Black female voice of May Ayim and empowerment in performing

microaggressions. I will investigate themes of diaspora, intertextuality, and *Heimat* as performed by Label Noir in *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*. As I will show, Label Noir utilizes Brechtian and diasporic motifs to describe the *Alltag* of many Black people in Germany and redefine traditional notions of *Heimat.*

My analysis builds on concepts of diasporic and Brechtian techniques and intertextuality. The play contains connections to the diaspora through dance, song, clothing, and pictures. Although the actors use these objects as part of the play, this is not documentary theater. Instead, their use of images, music and clothing can be understood as what Jacqueline Nassy Brown calls "diasporic iconography,"[201] which is similar to intertextuality, but centers around the diaspora. In particular, there is a strong connection to the work of Afro-German poet May Ayim; some of the ideas that Ayim explores in her poetry are raised in the play in terms of stereotypes –specifically, that Blackness means foreignness. Ayim's poetry and essay collections also influence the interpretation of *Heimat* as bittersweet.[202] Using Brechtian elements, the play emphasizes relationships and waiting for change, but it is not held hostage by Brecht's theory and breaks away from Brechtian techniques when necessary.

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[201] Campt, "The Crowded Space of Diaspora," 97.

[202] Moses Leo explains that home is bittersweet in a *Euromight.com* article: "Well, it is because of various experiences you have as a Black German: I grew up here, I work here and I live here. But because I don't look like the white majority, people define me as "the other" and believe that I don't belong here. They give me the feeling that I am not part of this country. The thing is that for many people here in Germany it does not come together that you can be black and German at the same time. My experiences of everyday racism added up to an extent where I didn't want to deal with them on my own anymore. This is where the group came in and why I joined in order to perform and deal with these issues in a creative way." Natasha Kelley, "Label Noir Takes German Life to Stage," *Euromight.com*, http://euromight.com/article/labelnoir.net.

B. Empowerment

1. Empowerment through Diaspora

The African diaspora[203] is prominent in the performance of *Heimat, bittersüße, Heimat*. It is depicted through images, props, music, dance, spoken and performance language. The performance projects pictures of notable Afro-Germans, Afro-Europeans, and celebrities of the African diaspora on the screen, such as Michael Jackson, German soccer star Steffi Jones, and CDU politician Charles Huber, among others. As the spectator is forced to look at Black people on screen, the viewer takes in images of a group of people who are often marginalized.[204] Further, actors wear brightly colored Ankara wax fabric at the start of the play, while the stage directions call for dancing a Viennese waltz to "The Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss, Jr. and an "African" dance to the 1991 song "Zing Zong" by Kanda Bongo Man. These stark contrasts set up cultures in rigid binaries, which is a metaphor for how Germans deal with cultures.

First, it is important to examine the choice behind Kanda Bongo Man's hit "Zing Zong." The Congolese singer is known for the Soukous style, popular in Congo, which gained popularity in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s when many Soukous singers lived in

[203] As we know Africa is not only the departure point of the diaspora, but also intertwined with it. Treating Africa separate from the diaspora simplifies a more complicated history that European countries specifically have had with Africa. For the purpose of my dissertation, I use the back and forth influence from Africa as part of the diaspora itself.

[204] I realize that actors are not marginalized, but Black people are. I argue here that celebrities are first seen as Black, then as celebrity. The best example of this would be tennis star James Blake. Scott Rafferty, "NYPD Commissioner Apologizes to Tennis Player James Blake for Mistaken Arrest," *Rolling Stone*, September 10, 2015, http://www.rollingstone.com/sports/news/nypd-commissioner-apologizes-to-tennis-player-james-blake-for-mistaken-arrest-20150910.

France.[205] A pioneer of the musical genre, Kanda lived in Paris and brought the style to Europe.[206] Soukous combines the rhythms of Cuban rumba, with lyrics sung in French or Lingala. The Soukous style incorporates the snare drum and two to three guitars. Music reviewer Gary Stewart describes Kanda Bongo Man's intricate usage of the guitar: "The guitars play at the same the time but skillfully never intrude on each other's territory."[207] Indeed, the upbeat "Zing Zong" begins with a slow guitar riff and then picks up after eight counts. In the play, the actors don't dance the Soukous "shake" or try a rumba, but instead they form a circle and move their shoulders and hips to the beat, presenting a stark contrast to the very stiff waltz. While Soukous songs usually focus on political issues or the challenges of metropolitan living,[208] Kanda claims that his songs are not political, but rather thematize love and everyday life.[209] However "Zing Zong" incorporates nuances of diasporic connection, culture criticism, and reinvention.

"African" identity is thus contrasted in the play with European identity through music and dance. Beginning the play with this type of cultural contrast presents stereotypical binaries, with European identity embodied in the partner dance waltz, and "African" identity represented through the collective dance with joyful outbursts and sways of the hip during "Zing Zong." There are other comparisons here: between high

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[205] "Soukous," in *Encyclopedia of Africa*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[206] Gary Stewart, "Soukous Chic: Kanda Bongo Man," in *Breakout* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

[207] Ibid.

[208] "Soukous."

[209] Stewart, 12.

culture and low culture, anticipated beats and syncopation. While this choice seems to place "African" identity in opposition to German identity, in the next three acts the actors work through—and transcend— this binary approach to culture.

The first and last images projected on stage are of legendary Afro-German poet and activist May Ayim. Her poems "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II" incorporate humor and satire and are an example of diasporic iconography. As a pioneering Afro-German author and activist, Ayim was able to publish her poetry and research with a feminist publisher in Germany. In her work, Ayim thematizes notions of *Heimat* and belonging; the theater group addresses this by presenting different interactions involving Germanness and Black Germanness. As a self-proclaimed feminist, Milagro uses the autonomy and representation that the stage offers for self-expression.

Within the play, Label Noir does what Patricia Hill Collins calls reclaiming and reinterpreting of Black feminist thought. Collins' understanding of Black women's everyday knowledge is powerful in thinking about the microagressions Black Germans experience. In the chapter, "Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought," from her landmark book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins describes how Black women are the creators of knowledge. Black feminist thought offers an alternative view of Black women and their experiences. Collins explains, "Black feminist thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists."[210] With this statement, Collins gives agency to Black women that has been continuously denied. This

[210] Patricia Hills Collins, "Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 32.

places importance on affirming what has been said in the past and rearticulating it. Thusly, Label Noir reinterprets and rearticulates Ayim's "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II" on the stage through various dialogues.

In the next three acts, the actors perform racialized and gendered identity to discuss nation. As *Heimat* is embodied in a white heterosexual female identity,[211] white German women on stage have the privilege of interrogating Black German women. The women who belong are performed as white by the Afro-German actors; it is clear that they are white based on their lines. The first act of *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* is entitled "Heimat, erster Versuch" [*Heimat*, first attempt]. In the scene "Gestern auf der Parkbank" [Yesterday on the park bench], an older white German woman simply identified in the stage directions as "Oma" [grandma] comes to sit on a park bench, already occupied by an Afro-German girl. The scene is aptly named "Gestern," or "Yesterday," implying that these are the types of conversations Black Germans experienced in the past. Even before Oma speaks to the girl, she decides, based on the girl's skin color, that she is foreign and addresses her in English with a strong German accent: "This place free?"[212] The Oma thus places the girl outside the German nation and expects the girl not to be able to speak German. After hearing the girl speak with a thick Bavarian accent on her cell phone, the Oma is surprised, but she still places the girl's identity outside the German nation.

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[211] See Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002); 63, Plumly, 62; Friederike Emonds, "Contested Memories: *Heimat* and *Vaterland* in Ilse Langner's *Frau Emma kämpft im Hinterland*," *Women in German Yearbook* 14 (1998): 167.

[212] Lara Milagro, *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* (Unpublished), Act 1, Scene 2.

In Ayim's poems "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II," the reader only hears from the white German woman. However, in the Label Noir retake on the poem, the Afro-German girl speaks. Oma is shocked and exclaims: "Ihr Deutsch! . . . Es ist fehlerfrei, ganz hervorragend! . . . Sie machen keinen einzigen Fehler" [Your German! It's error free! Excellent!...You don't make any mistakes]. The Afro-German girl responds: "Sie auch nicht"[213] [You don't either]. This quip addresses the ridiculousness of the woman's expectations about race and language without being overly aggressive. With it, the Afro-German girl shows the problem in Oma's assumption that there is a correlation between skin color and native language.

The white woman eagerly tries to discover more details about the girl, but she asks questions in the form of statements: "Ihre Eltern sind aus Afrika? . . . Ah, jetzt hab ich's: Sie sind adoptiert!" [Your parents are from Africa? Oh, now I've got it: You're adopted!]. The girl avoids answering and complains about the late S-Bahn, symbolizing both literally waiting for a train that never comes and figuratively waiting to cease to be a peculiarity in German society. The girl exercises agency by refusing to engage with the woman; she refuses to answer questions and instead strikes up a conversation on a banal matter, like the punctuality of the train. The Oma becomes upset and says: "Ich wollte mehr über Ihre Herkunft erfahren, denn ich interessiere mich für andere Kulturen" [I wanted to know more about your background, because I'm interested in other cultures]. Still, the point made here is the same as in Ayim's poems: Oma cannot comprehend a Germany with Black people native to it; she is fixated on the girl's racial identity and on placing it outside the boarders of the German nation.

[213] Ibid. A similar scene takes place in the 1998 film *Alles wird gut* by director Angelina Maccarone and scriptwriter Fatima El-Tayeb.

Such scenes of microaggression are referenced in Grada Kilomba's book *Plantation Memories* (2008). In this case, microaggressions subtly indicate that, based on skin color, a person does not belong to a community. In the example above, the Black German presence is seen as incompatible with the German nation. The work of Black German scholar Kilomba is useful in understanding the everyday racism involved when Afro-Germans are treated as strangers or foreigners within their own community. In *Plantation Memories*, Kilomba clarifies: "Those who are 'different' remain perpetually incompatible with the nation; they can never actually belong, they are irreconcilably *Ausländer* [foreigners]. The questions 'where do you come from' or 'do you intend to go back' embody exactly this fantasy of incompatibility."[214] Kilomba's reconstruction and recovering of Black women's experiences includes an analysis of microaggressions and staking a claim in German society. In her dissertation, Plumly explains Kilomba's analysis: "Specifically, Kilomba conveys that Blackness signifies 'being out of place' while whiteness signifies 'being in place' (30)."[215] Blackness then, always resides outside the nation.

Considering nation and *Heimat*, Plumly explains that *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* offers a "recognition process among white Germans as to who is included in German national identity and *Heimat* and the realm of German national culture, but making Afro- and Black Germans visible, vocal, and audible in a site where they often go unseen and unheard."[216] Performing German national identity and *Heimat* in these dialogues on stage

[214] Kilomba, 65.

[215] Plumly, 21, citing Kilomba, 30.

[216] Plumly, 161.

provides agency and empowerment for the actors involved. An actress in one of these dialogue scenes, Dela, clarifies how these scenes empower her as an actress on stage, reversing the invisibility of Afro-Germans: "Playing out real-life situations on stage can be liberating . . . Instead of just feeling fed up, this is a way to turn it around."[217] The play continues the discussion of exclusion from the nation in the next scenes.

In the second scene of the first act, "Morgen auf der Parkbank" (Tomorrow on the park bench), Label Noir rearticulates and reaffirms Ayim's idea of portraying what a similar problematic dialogue would be like between women of the same age but different social strata. If the exchange in the previous scene between the Oma and girl referenced a prior moment or "yesterday," as the character of Oma is type-cast as a person who lives in the past, then conversely, the next scene's discussion is considered forthcoming. In this scene a conversation takes place between an *Öko-Frau* [modern day hippie], described as white in the list of characters, and an Afro-German businesswoman waiting at the bus stop. The latter is dressed in a suit and frequently makes calls to her office while typing away on her laptop. Dressed in loose fitting linen, which hints at her support of sustainability, the *Öko-Frau* constantly interrupts the Afro-German woman, asking her questions ranging from where she can get dreads done (the Afro-German woman does not know), to where she bought her bracelets (Chanel, not "Africa" as the white woman wants to believe). Then, the *Öko-Frau* goes on to say that the Afro-German woman looks just like her friend from Guinea-Bissau, showing her a photo. Obviously, this moment

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[217] Alexa Dvorson "Theater Ensemble Serves Up Snapshots of German Racism," *Deutsche Welle*, March 24, 2010, accessed December 2014, http://www.dw.com/en/theater-ensemble-serves-up-snapshots-of-german-racism/a-5381112.

points to the stereotypical belief that all Black people look alike. This scene displays an effort to dramatize the *Öko-Frau*, not to make her a caricature. Instead it illuminates racist behaviors that are well intentioned, as for example, when the *Öko-Frau* sings Bob Marley's "One Love," and yells "Hey, that is your music!" at the Afro-German businesswoman. The *Öko-Frau* consumes Black culture in such a consumer-oriented capitalist way that she treats the businesswoman as if she is only there for her own gratification.[218] This language highlights the eroticism and exoticism of Black women, as well as white people's expectation that a Black woman is there for their satisfaction in order to "provoke pleasure"; the Black woman in this instance exists as the "embodiment of exoticism and satisfaction."[219]

The businesswoman on stage recognizes that she is being exoticized by the *Öko-Frau*. Thus, hearing the *Öko-Frau*'s words leaves her horrified. Her physical movement away from the *Öko-Frau* and unwillingness to further interact with the *Öko-Frau* further proves her understanding of the exchange. The businesswoman shuts her laptop, takes out a remote control from her bag, and presses the pause button, thereby making the *Öko - Frau* freeze. She stands and proceeds to leave the bus stop. After she is approximately twenty feet away, the Afro-German businesswoman presses the play button and briskly walks away. The idea of being able to push a pause button on someone to disengage in an uncomfortable situation is not only an enviable moment for Black audience members, but also gives the woman agency once again in the form of choosing the option to not engage with the "but I did not mean it that way!" type of racism prevalent in contemporary

[218] For more information on consuming Black culture, see bell hooks' *Black Looks*.

[219] Kilomba, 68.

society. Even with the best intentions and wish for identification, the *Öko-Frau* has held onto stereotypes of Black people. While she desires to perform Black culture (e.g. dreads) and claims to be knowledgeable about it, her words and actions, although well meaning, are offensive.

In the above dialogue between the two women, power is central, as the *Öko-Frau* completely undercuts the businesswoman's identity. Instead of seeing her as a businessperson, the *Öko-Frau* only sees the superficial signs of her Black female identity and nothing further. Her clothes, jewelry, laptop, and anything else that marks her as a busy professional who does not want to engage in a conversation, are irrelevant. Even after asking multiple questions, the *Öko-Frau* is not able to move beyond a Black woman's identity as being anything but what she imagines.

In a similar scene entitled "Deutsch oder nicht Deutsch: Fragen über Fragen," [German or not German: Questions about Questions], the actors perform another iteration of racism, this time from two white women. Once again, Label Noir applies Patricia Hill Collins' notion of reaffirming and rearticulation to Ayim's "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II," somewhat mirroring the way Ayim utilizes themes of good intentions with racist undertones. Two white German women sitting in folding chairs on stage are accosted by German soccer fans. All actors (including the white women) face the audience, as they pretend to watch a soccer game on an invisible large screen. In black-red-and-gold, the fans shout and cheer with drunken revelry as they celebrate a goal by German's national soccer team. The two women condemn soccer, nationalism, and fandom and proceed to talk about contemporary German culture. As in the case of the earlier dialogues, their brief exchange shows that even those with good intentions can

perpetuate racial stereotypes. They begin by seemingly hating their own culture: “Sag mal, bist du eigentlich gern Deutsche? Nein, Deutschsein ist Scheiße. Wegen der Geschichte und so” [Hey, are you happy to be German? No, being German is shitty. Because of the history and everything]. For the rest of the scene, the two women praise other cultures, but they do so in a problematic way. They assume their activities—drumming in a drum circle, belly dancing and attending the Carnival of Cultures parade—free them from the possibility of being racist. One woman concludes it is impossible for her to be racist because she is married to an African man: “Ich kann ja gar nichts Rassistisches gesagt haben, weil ich ja mit einem Afrikaner verheiratet bin!” [I could not have said anything racist, because I’m married to an African!]. Comically, she cannot remember which African country her husband is from.[220] One of the women further contends that foreigners have the ability to take life so easy: “Die planen nicht lange voraus, sondern leben einfach in den Tag hinein. Das ist doch das Tolle an den Exoten: die singen und tanzen und lachen—und nehmen das Leben nicht so schwer” [They don’t plan ahead, and instead enjoy the moment. That’s the great thing about exotics: they sing and dance and laugh and don’t take life so seriously].[221]

This assumption of a laid-back attitude and joy that the play references misrepresents People of Color as a whole and simultaneously unsettles white expectations when PoCs are not these things. Label Noir makes efforts to criticize subtle racism disguised as a compliment. The actors leave the stage with one closed fist (referencing but not identical to a Black Power fist), and the farewell “Bleib krass” [Stay

[220] Milagro, Act 2, Scene 3.

[221] Ibid.

woke]. While the characters in this scene participate in activities that they think give them intercultural competency (e.g. belly dancing helps them understand Arabic mentality), they still perpetuate the same dangerous stereotypes and ideologies from which racism stems.

2. Empowerment through Brecht

Label Noir also performs empowerment utilizing Brechtian theater practices. In the setting of a five-act play, Label Noir uses Brecht provocatively by employing his techniques for challenging a passive audience in their production methods and plot construction. On the passive spectator, Brecht comments: "True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance: an expression which comes from the Middle Ages, the days of witches and priests."[222] To work against this, Brecht recommends the use of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effekt or in English alienation effect or A-effect).[223] Brecht explains: "The first condition for the A-effect's application to this end is that the stage and auditorium must be purged of everything 'magical' and that no 'hypnotic tensions' should be set up."[224] This keeps the audience members actively engaged in the performance. When audience members stay engaged, they watch and react to the racism and the microaggressions. I

[222] Bertolt Brecht, "Short Organum for the Theater," in *Brecht on Theater*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 187.

[223] It is also important to mention that there are problems with the alienation effect. Brecht's theories stem from Western fantasies about the East, rather than Chinese acting. Theater experts Katrin Sieg, Min Tian, and Carol J. Martin are just a few scholars who disagree with Brecht's understanding of Chinese acting. Tian refers back to Martin Esslin who reminds us that Brecht loved the exotic and the vulgar.

[224] Brecht,"Short Description of a New Technique for Acting," in *Brecht on Theater*, 136.

believe this makes a white audience unsettled and uncomfortable, because they are implicated in witnessing microagression after microaggresion.

Alienation techniques are used in the production of *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*. Label Noir strips the magical from the performance by means of minimalistic scenery so that the stage always seems empty. The set is striking, because it is not a realistic representation of a homespace or a bus stop. Using only a table, a few chairs, or a bed does not set the complete scene, but the minimalist approach fulfills assumptions so that the audience knows where the scene is supposed to take place. The lack of pictures, throw pillows, and blankets, for example, reminds the audience member s/he is watching a play. Another reminder comes in the form of dual roles. When each actor plays multiple characters, audience members see the actors as professionals playing a role and as not playing themselves. This technique removes the ability of the audience to conflate the actor with the character.[225] Further, the actors (rather than stagehands) tear down each scene in front of the audience instead of behind a curtain. Watching the actors move pieces of the set around makes the audience, constantly aware that they are watching a theater production and disrupts the play's possible hypnotic effects.

Alienation effects are also used in the plot construction by marking noticeable breaks from the narrative. Brecht encourages noticeable breaks that are obvious to the audience so as to encourage their emotional disengagement from the plot.[226] In the play's prologue, the actors ask the audience the question: "Wer oder Was is ein guter Mensch?"

[225] Later in the chapter, I suggest that this relationship between character and audience member shifts, but the Brechtian aspects work against this.

[226] Brecht, "Short Organum," 196.

[Who or What is a good person?], followed by a series of other questions which serve to answer the original question. At the very beginning of the play, for example, the actors explain that this is a play: "Wir werden heute abend eine Geschichte erzählen"[227] [This evening, we will tell a story]. This opening is almost like a fairy tale, except here there is no prince or princess. Later, when the Showmaster and Show-girls sing "Ein weißer Junge aus Karlsruh,'" the Showmaster constantly stops the song and jokingly yells at the sound technician in the back of the room. Such breaks are essential to interrupt the narrative flow and help audience members think critically about what they are watching on stage. Although the actors say in the opening monologue that they will share one story, they also note the variegated stories of the Afro-German experience in their next line: "Nichts an dieser Geschichte ist erfunden und nichts ist genauso passiert" [Nothing in this story is invented and nothing happened exactly this way].[228] By using this sentence, actors demonstrate that there is more than one Afro-German story and that they have taken some creative license with situations in the play. Statements like this point to the Brechtian elements of audience engagement and noticeable breaks in the play.

The actors remind the audience that the play simultaneously is and is not the story of Afro-Germans in Germany. Moses Leo, who acted in *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*, explains: "Of course, the theatrical scenes have been dramatized and written and performed on stage and therefore they are in a way a little exaggerated, you could say.

[227] Milagro, Act 1, Scene 1.

[228] Ibid.

But the scenes were all inspired by real-life experiences."[229] Finally, as the actors continue with the opening monologue, they almost negate the next five acts: "Diese Geschichten könnten sich auch schon bald verändern und dann ganz anders erzählt werden. Je nachdem" [These stories could soon change and then be explained totally differently. As the case may be.][230] This contradiction — we will share a story that may one day no longer be relevant—could be read as a hope that these situations for Afro-Germans will change; this immediate reminder, or hope, prepares the audience for a future in which these microagressions no longer exist.

Label Noir also uses the alienation effect in various video clips throughout the performance. They drop the fourth wall in the video, and the actors have a conversation with the audience.[231] An Afro-German male actor addresses the camera, which is taking the place of a Black woman at a bar. Based on the actor's comments in reference to her skin color, gestures (like lip-licking), and encompassing gaze, the spectator can assume that the male actor represents a white male. After he tries to talk to the camera, "we/spectators" decline the actor's advances. He becomes hostile and replies, "Piss off!"—reflecting the verbal insults young Black women can receive for not being sexually available to the men around them. In another video scene, one of the actors looks and speaks to the camera lens, thus making the audience part of the dialogue. While this model has been used in the play before, this dialog makes it possible for audience members to see how offensive this exchange can be. By turning the question around, the

[229] Natasha Kelly, "Exclusive: Label Noir takes German life to stage," *Euromight.com*, accessed May 3, 2013, http://euromight.com/article/labelnoir.

[230] Milagro, "Prologue," *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*.

[231] Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique for Acting," in *Brecht on Theater*, 136.

audience is then the recipient of the question, "Where are you from? Why do you speak such excellent German?" This method contains the seeds of change; it makes the recipient know how it feels to be asked that question. Asking the audience the same questions that Afro-Germans are asked over and over again reveals how absurd these questions are. The audience has the chance to reflect on the ways they have interacted with Afro-Germans and on how and if they have had similar notions as the Oma in the first act. They see, maybe for the first time, the inability of Afro-Germans to belong in Germany.

Label Noir also incorporates Brechtian strategies through the inclusion of multiple musical elements performed by a fictional doo-wop group of the 1960s. A male lead singer, or "Showmaster," in a suit and four female background singers, in short bobbed wigs and matching sequined dresses, perform an upbeat dance on an empty stage. As he engages with the crowd, the male lead continuously stops the music to "yell" at the audio technician or background singers. In clichéd fashion, his background singers fight for his affection, fight with each other, and fight for attention from the audience. With these built-in stops, the group constantly interrupt themselves, which makes it impossible for the audience to enjoy the full song, thereby interrupting its hypnotic effect.

As Brecht explains in "Short Organum," music should work in a play to alienate the spectator and encourage critical thinking and should exist as a separation of elements instead of melodic flow.[232] Brecht sought to generate alienation by changing the way songs are performed. As Kim Kowalke notes, "By fixing the rhythm, stress, pitch, timbre, pauses, phrasing, dynamics, tempos and intonation of his poetry in a musical setting,

[232] Brecht "Short Organum," 179.

Brecht hoped to make his works virtually performer proof and ensure a 'drug-free' effect on their audiences."[233] This type of music does not allow the spectator to fall into a trance, because it subverts his or her expectations: "The resulting 'play' between the music and the lyric--particularly frustrating expectations and subverting conventions--could convey complicated layers of meaning and contradictory attitudes."[234] *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* is able to show these "complicated layers of meaning" through doo-wop performances, incorporation of different music.

Abrupt stops create a non-immersive experience. After a short dance performance, the lead stops the music to begin a telethon for white German boys of Karlsruhe who suffer through long winters and pleads with the audience, "Wir müssen helfen!" [we have to help].[235] These disruptive moments allow the actors to engage with audience members. The actors take the old *Schlager* [hit] "Ein Indiojunge aus Peru" [An Indian Boy from Peru] (1974), by Katja Ebstein, and rewrite it as "Ein weißer Junge aus Karlsruh'" [A White Boy from Karlsruhe]. As the play takes a familiar melody and adds new text, the audience members must actively listen to the rewritten song. The lyrics – "A white boy from Karlsruh'/he wants to live like you/but the doors remained closed" – parody telethons for third world children; the group collects money to send the white German boy a coat. They sing loudly and off-key, referencing Brecht who also used

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[233] Kim Kowalke, "Brecht and Music: Theory and Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226.

[234] Ibid., 227.

[235] Because actor Jonathan Aikins took part in the YoungStars project, there are connections to the "Africanizing Europe" skit. However, closer parallels can be made to the "Radi-Aid" project for Africans to help Norwegians. See more on their website: http://www.rustyradiator.com/.

"uncultivated voices" in singing.[236] Of course, the actors are trained singers, but they employ off-key singing to defamiliarize the audience and keep them engaged. The audience laughs as they remember the old hit and recognize the comedy in the situation.

Within this scene is also embedded a critique of Black people needing aid from Western nations. Before singing the song, the group raises their right fists in the air in the Black Power salute. This frozen stance after the previous dance and choreography creates tension. Further, it generates critical thinking by evoking the Black Power movement at the beginning of their song about a white child from Karlsruhe. This scene is reminiscent of the stance during the 1968 Mexico City Olympics when American gold medalist Tommie Smith and silver medalist John Carlos raised their fists on the medal podium. Label Noir references this, referring to it as a Black Panther pose from the Olympics in the stage directions.[237] The raised fist, which symbolizes Black Power, makes white people nervous because anything celebrating Black identity evokes strong negative reactions as it rejects white supremacy. This is part of a larger intervention through theater to engage in critical thinking, to link the familiar song to Black Power and to bring the discussion back to race, reflecting the beginning of the play.

Label Noir does not strictly adhere to Brechtian theories, however, implicitly acknowledging that his techniques have limitations for People of Color. Instead, they cherry pick his theories for their purpose. They seek to create audience identification through general relatable circumstances. This is important because it creates humor. They reject Brechtian theories in other ways as well. For example, the actors do not use the

[236] Kolwalke, 254.

[237] Milagro, Act 3, Scene 5.

third person as recommended by Brecht.[238] Further, stage directions are not spoken aloud. These decisions in part reflect the fact that the actors of Label Noir feel audience identification with the actors can be productive. Label Noir manipulates audience emotions using images of family and friends, making the play extremely personal; the actors are not playing a role here but playing their own experiences and identities, or a friend's experiences, which goes against Brechtian theory. They thus utilize the parts of Brechtian theory, while also not being dogmatically attached to the theory. This shows the limits to his theories and their continued relevance. It is important to Label Noir to create and stress a different type of politics than Brecht.

While many of the Label Noir performers were trained in German theater traditions, and their employment of Brecht is logical, there is also an insufficiency in his work for People of Color. Label Noir makes it possible for People of Color in audiences to identify with certain scenes. If an audience member is Black German or a minority in Germany, there is the possibility to identify with scenes and situations in the first half of the play. Former ensemble member Moses Leo explains, "And we also address Black people and people of colour who can identify with our scenes. We get a lot of positive feedback most of the time because people of colour feel represented, see that their issues are addressed, and know that they are not alone."[239] For a Black audience it is cathartic to see themselves on stage and to validate experiences that they have lived through their entire lives. On stage, they are seen, and know their experiences are not the exception, but the rule.

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[238] Brecht, "Short Description," 138.
[239] Kelly, "Exclusive: Label Noir takes German life to stage."

It is important for Label Noir to also perform for white audiences as well. Moses Leo explains in an interview that Label Noir performs for both white Germans and People of Color: "We perform for everybody! It is important that we address white people in Germany to confront them with the experiences that we have had."[240] Towards the end, the play expands to commonalities in romantic relationships, which is more universal. This widens the connection for white German audiences to relate to the scenarios in the play. Anyone with an experience with a partner can relate to the romantic disagreements. However, Brecht contends there should be no identification between the spectator and actor.[241] The choice not to employ Brechtian techniques reveals their goal as actors to seek identification as part of their performance mission as well.

Through the performance, there is validation for People of Color, but this validation does present a problem. Because Label Noir does not outright state their position, nothing is explicitly said; the audience member is instead supposed to make connections for her/himself. Ideally, an audience would recognize moments in their lives when such conversations took place, but without the direct explanation, the conscious understanding of racism unfortunately may not take place. An audience member may not understand that the performed dialogues are problematic. Indeed, the earlier conversations are perfect examples of the microaggressions Black Germans experience. An audience member may not understand, however, that contrasting African identity with European identity is only meant to tear down a binary notion of culture, instead of

[240] Ibid.

[241] Brecht, "Short Organum," 191.

reinforcing it.[242] The play challenges audience notions of Afro-German identity either for the first time, or through replaying it, and makes the audience member question if what s/he sees on stage is acceptable.

3. Empowerment through Autobiography

Like *real life: Deutschland*, Label Noir takes empowerment from their own stories instead of focusing on victimhood in the way they frame their monologues. Two actors take turns sharing their personal stories about Germanness and Blackness in monologues--what they name "Standortbestimmungen"[243]--performed by Leander Graf and Dela Dabulamanzi. The monologues inherently break the fourth wall because here the actors talk to the audience on a bare stage (individually, and at different times, not simultaneously). This happens so often in the play it hardly seems noteworthy, yet the repetitive breaking of the wall is worth mentioning. While the monologues do not have to be autobiographical, these stories are shared as if they are real life experiences of the actors on stage. Reviewer Andrea Schneider also read these monologues as truth: "Das Programm ist voll solcher oft bitterbösen Gedankenfetzen und Szenen und bekommt eine größere Intensität, as Leander Graf, Moses Leo oder Dela [Dabulamanzi] selbst an den

[242] It is interesting to think about how this play is not over the top, or campy, in its approach to race in Germany. One can think of this play and its employment of Brecht as reinforcing stereotypes, but I do not believe this is the case because of actors' refusal to support and play stereotypical Black roles.

[243] See *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*, Acts 3 and 4. In an email correspondence with the author on May 27, 2016, Milagro explained: "Standortbestimmungen heißt es deshalb, weil es in den Monologen darum geht, einen Standpunkt zu definieren, selbst zu definieren, wo man herkommt, wo man hingehört, wer man ist, wie man benannt werden möchte usw."

Bühnenrand treten und ein Stück ihrer Herkunft rekapitulieren"[244] [The program is full of angry shreds of thought and scenes and grows in intensity, as Leander Graf, Moses Leo or Dela come on stage and recap their lives]. The monologues thus change the fictional play into an autobiography (although whether or not they are fictional or autobiographical remains unclear). This shift from the fictional to the autobiographical realm is the audience's first inkling of how the play and the actors' lives blend into one another. In the monologue, actors share their emotional experience growing up as Black Germans. The large audience becomes a homogeneous character, acting in dialog with the actors. This treatment of the audience fosters audience engagement.

During the second act, when Leander Graf performs his monologue, he begins with a question he gets from strangers: "Wo kommst du her?" [Where are you from?]. His response, Kiel, confuses people, but if he were to deny his hometown, he would feel like a *Vaterlandverräter* [traitor]. Heinrich Heine scholar Anna Wierzbicka defines the term *Vaterlandverräter* as a betrayer of the people; notice in her definition that the distinction is in betraying people and not an abstract nation.[245] Heine used this idea in the preface to his poem, "Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen" (1844): "Ich höre schon ihre Bierstimmen: du lästerst sogar über unsere Farben, Verräter des Vaterlands, Freund der Franzosen, denen du den freien Rhein abtreten willst!" [I already hear your drunken voices: you blaspheme even our flag, you betrayer of the country, friend of the French, to

[244] Andrea Schneider, "Die Frage nach dem Gutsein," *Tagesspiegel Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, March 1, 2011, http://www.pnn.de/Potsdam-kultur/379533/.

[245] Anna Wierzbicka, *Homeland and Fatherland: Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167.

whom you want to relinquish the Rhine!]. Heine shares the rumors he hears about himself betraying the people for befriending the French during the Napoleonic Wars.

After making the connection to a canonical German author, Graf goes on to connect himself to Germany's Nazi past. To prove that he is indeed German, he shares with the audience that his uncle was a Nazi. Considering the lack of Afro-Germans in Kiel, Graf says in his monologue, he desired to be white and prayed to God to make him white ("Lieber Gott, mach dass ich weiß wäre" [Dear God, make me white]). After his lament for white identity, he ends the monologue with an a cappella song. As he walks off stage, he sings the song quickly so that the audience members focus on his words rather than melody; it is "Davon geht die Welt nicht unter" [It won't bring the world to an end] by Zarah Leander, which was used in a Nazi era film, *Die große Liebe* (1941) [The great love] and became a popular song among soldiers on the front. The lyrics of the song--"The world won't end from that, although it is sometimes gray, everything will be more colorful…"--are a call for hope, but also a tongue-in-cheek comment on his own skin color. Graf chose this song for two reasons: it connects to his family's Nazi past and also to the poet Bruno Balz, who penned the lyrics while waiting in the custody of the Gestapo.[246] This information is hopefully present in the mind of older audience members, so that they could find similarities between their own biographies and that of this Afro-German.

During the fourth act, Dela Dabulamanzi performs her monologue. Instead of discussing German history like Graf, her monologue largely deals with the link of language to racial identity. She recalls a moment when an acquaintance asks her if she

[246] Leander Graf, email to author, November 27, 2015.

speaks English and suggests that she is not German; her Black skin must mean that she speaks English and that her forefathers live(d) in England or the United States. This assumption is problematic. It denies the relationships and colonial history of Germany; it erases the narratives of the early Africans in Germany (e.g. those in attendance at courts), and it denies her Germany as a *Heimat.* She explains to the audience, "Ich spreche nur Deutsch, sonst bin ich keine Deutsche" [I speak only German, otherwise I am not German]. In this statement, language and identity are linked instead of birthplace; for the record, Dabulamanzi was born in Cologne.[247] With language, the actress inscribes a place for herself in the German nation; her statement also distinguishes German identity from whiteness. Balancing a boombox on her head, she ends her monologue with the song "Charity," by Skunk Anansie, released in 1995. This British band takes its name from the Ghanaian tradition of the trickster spider, Anansi.[248] The song, far less controversial than other songs on their album,[249] is sung by Skin, a queer Black woman. Dabulamanzi sings the bridge and chorus a cappella: "I don't want your charity/twisting me around/I don't want your charity keeping me down." Though she never thematizes "charity" in her speech, perhaps here she is "being kept down" because German is not allowed to be her mother tongue. Her monologue reflects the larger purpose of the play: to claim an identity based on language, as the play is entirely in German.

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[247] "Künstler," Label Noir, labelnoir.net/ensemble.html.

[248] Dave Wilson, *Rock Formations: Categorical Answers to How Band Names Were Formed* (San Jose, CA: Cidermill, 2004), 230-31.

[249] Skunk Anansie, *Paranoid & Sunburnt*, September 16, 1995, One Little Indian Records, MP3. See songs "Selling Jesus" and "Little Baby Swastikkka" on the same album.

C. Relationships

1. Waiting

Symbolic waiting is thematized in the following act, which bears the same name, "Warten" [Waiting] as the poem the actors recite at the end of this scene. The play asks audience members to recall the actors literally waiting for the train on stage; in the fifth act the actors wait for a substantial change instead of a superficial one. The actors perform the problematic aspects of government agencies and essentially having to wait for them to change. Finally, the actors perform the wait for colonial street names—here "Mohrenstraße" or "M-Straße" —to change. The poem begins with waiting for spring, which often symbolizes rebirth, and then ends with waiting for a person. The poem shows the desire for this period of waiting to be over:

> Warten auf den Frühling
> Warten auf Veränderung
> Warten auf die große Liebe
> Warten.
>
> Warten auf die eine Nachricht
> Warten auf das schöne Leben
> Warten bis man an der Reihe ist
> Warten.
>
> Warten auf den großen Wurf
> Warten auf Anerkennung
> Warten auf dich
> Warten.
>
> Nicht mehr länger Warten
> Nicht mehr länger Warten
> Nicht mehr länger Warten
> Nicht mehr länger Warten[250]

[250] Waiting for spring, waiting for change, waiting the great love, waiting//Waiting for a message, waiting for a wonderful life, waiting for your turn, waiting//Waiting for success, waiting to be noticed, waiting for you, waiting//Not waiting much long, not waiting much longer, not waiting much longer, not waiting much longer.

The poem thematizes waiting in multiple forms: waiting for love, for your chance, for results, for equity. These are things that are not necessarily specific to Black Germans, but are universal. The entire ensemble repeats the line "Nicht mehr länger warten" [Not waiting much longer] four times on stage: the repetition conveys both a hope and a plea that change will happen sooner rather than later. For the purposes of this chapter, I examine the civil servant and the street name scenes. It is at this point in the play that trauma moves from being presented as microaggressions experienced at the hands of strangers to daily trauma experienced as a collective. These scenes are particularly striking because they center around racism carried out by the city government that Afro-Germans face daily.

In the next scene, two civil servants from the imaginary government agency KHB_FD, which is meant to help minorities but doesn't, are celebrating with some wine at the office in the evening. They sit near a filing cart at a shared desk, with pens, paper, and office supplies on a table. While they work, a Muslim man who is being followed by white German teens calls the office; they explain that they are closed and he should call back during normal business hours—this is absurd and pokes fun at bureaucratic hours in Germany. The audience sees a shadow of a man running backstage behind a white curtain, and then two or three people following him and eventually beating him to the ground. Here, the irony is that the agency exists for intercultural competence and minorities, yet when a minority person has a real problem, the civil servants are unwilling to provide him the help he needs.

In the street name scene, the actors attempt to initiate change by changing the name of the street called Mohrenstraße. The actual Berlin street and corresponding U-

Bahn station were renamed Mohrenstraße, from Otto-Grotewohl-Straße, in 1991 after unification. The name Moor Street recalls the antiquated term used from Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, when Africans were referred at as "Moors," describing their skin and religion, which was considered "heathen." [251] Further, this term recalls the African soldiers who were "acquired."[252] This terminology hints to a forced move, and therefore kidnapping and slavery. Africans were also traded and exchanged between courts as gifts like property.[253] One Afro-German also said that the name reminded them of the "Moor heads" on top of sticks that the Germans put on display during colonial times. These are the violent, oppressive images reflected in the name of the street. May Ayim also touches on Mohrenstraße in interviews in the documentary about her life, *Hope in my Heart* (1997). In the film, she eats a *Schoko-kuss* (a chocolate sweet also formerly known as *Mohrenköpfe* or Moor's Heads) standing in front of the Mohrenstraße U-Bahn station.[254]

While Ayim takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to bringing awareness to the issue, Label Noir does not use humor to discuss the same topic. Instead, the actors of Label

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[251] Ayim, "Rassismus, Sexismus und vorkoloniales Afrikabild in Deutschland," in *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, edited by Katharina Oguntoye, May Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz, (Berlin: Orlanda, 1986).

[252] Christian Kopp and Marius Krohn, "Orte: Blues in Schwarzweiss. Die Black Community in Widerstand gegen kolonialrassistische Straßennamen in Berlin-Mitte," http://www.berlin-postkolonial.de/cms/index.php/orte/78-afrikanisches-viertel. Additionally, on Berlin-Postkolonial.de, the article "Ramlers Bericht über Anschaffung von 150 Mohren" explains the soldier's position in Berlin: http://www.berlin-postkolonial.de/cms/index.php/dokumente/2-dokumente/dokumente/58-schueckkolonial-politik. See also Richard Schück, *Brandenburg-Preußens Kolonial-Politik unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und seinen Nachfolgern*, Band II,1647-1721 (Leipzig: Grunow, 1889), 564.

[253] Anne Kuhlmann, "Ambiguous Duty," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, ed. Mischa Honeck et al. (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 57-73, 60.

[254] Other names I have personally heard include "Mohrkuss" and "N-titten."

Noir read a letter, verbatim, that was written to them by the city management of Berlin-Mitte regarding the name change. In the letter, the municipal authorities recognize the problematic history of the name and the word *Mohr*[255] and offer the street name Königin von Saba Straße as a replacement. At the end of the play, the old street name is physically removed by one of the actors, indicating that they envision change coming. The actors pose for five or six pictures in front of the new street sign, pointing to it each time.

During one performance I attended, some audience members clapped. But I wonder, is the change good enough? The "Queen of Sheba" is an interesting, almost mythical choice for a replacement. Her Black identity is seen as an exception and limitation, not as something worth celebrating.[256] A person from the past, the Queen of Sheba, is constantly marked as a foreigner and resides outside of Germany. There are many more recent people of African descent who present themselves as better options for street names, such as Anton Wilhelm Amo, Martin Dibobe, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Perhaps Label Noir makes a more complex comment about change for the audience: that change will come, but slowly, and perhaps multiple changes are necessary to achieve the desired result.

Currently, two actors of Label Noir—Lara Milagro and Dela Dabulamanzi— are performing as part of a colonial legacies tour entitled "Dauerkolonie Berlin: Postcolonial

[255] Milagro, Act 4, Scene 2.

[256] With the choice of the Queen of Sheba, they choose a Black woman from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faiths. Linking this to religion is divisive, and questionable to those who don't belong to the Judeo-Christian belief. Why name a street after a mythical figure? She is an exception because in the Bible she is described as a foreigner. This name option continues to set Black identity as outside of the German nation.

City Tour in English" led by (Joshua) Kwesi Aikins. On this tour, the actors and leader discuss issues, such as:

> Was geschah mit Menschen Afrikanischer Herkunft im Treptower Park? Wie kam die „Mohrenstraße" zu ihrem Namen? Warum hieß das May Ayim Ufer einst Gröben Ufer und und wie kam es zur Umbenennung? Wessen Kunstschätze beherbergt das Stadtschloss, wessen Köpfe lagern in den Archiven der Charité? Warum entstand mitten im Wedding das Afrikanische Viertel? [What happened to the people of African descent in Treptower Park? How did 'Moor Street' get its name? Why did May Ayim Ufer used to be called Gröben Ufer and how did the street name change? Whose art treasures are housed in the City Palace, whose heads are stored in the archives in Charité [university medical archive in Berlin]? Why did the African Quarter emerge in the middle of Wedding?].[257]

These questions, and the tour itself, seek to reinsert the Black history that was erased from Berlin. The continued discussion of M-Straße today shows the same desire for change as Label Noir envisioned in 2010. Thus, the issues raised in the play are still relevant, not only for actors involved, and continue to be important for the larger Black/Afro-German community.

2. Romantic Relationships

The theme of waiting lingers into the fifth act of the play, which is performed by three couples.[258] Loved ones wait for their partners to return home or wait to hear the

[257] Ballhaus Naunynstraße's Faceoook page, accessed June 15, 2015, last modified May 20, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/groups/30976782739/. See additional other performances: "Dauerkolonie Berlin: Performative Stadtführung," June 6, 2015, http://www.ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/veranstaltung /dauerkolonie_berlin_06.06.2015. Here is an additional article regarding the performance: Elena Liebenstein, "Erinnerung dekolonisieren--die performative Stadtführung 'Dauerkolonie Berlin' vom Ballhaus Naunynstraße," *Unruhe im Oberrang*, June 6, 2015, http://unruheimoberrang.net/2015/06/06/ erinnerung-dekolonisieren-die-performative-stadtfuhrung-dauerkolonie-berlin-vom-ballhaus-naunynstrase/.

[258] The scene with the male couple causes the audience to laugh here, while the female couple did not.

words “I love you.” Milagro explained to me that the second half (the acts after the intermission) of *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* deals with love, which makes the play relatable to everyone in the audience—much to Brecht’s chagrin. As the play progresses, race thus retreats as focal point. Communication and understanding between people regardless of race are increasingly thematized. Alternatively, the actors choose to discuss race in a different way. White actors are able to address universal themes but Black actors are assumed to only address themes relevant to them. Using Black actors to discuss universal themes of communication and love makes a profound statement about race.

The theme of communication breakdown that began at the beginning of the play continues in the last act, when three couples navigate interpersonal miscommunication. Journalist Simone Kämpf describes this transition as having nothing to do with race at all.[259] Instead, she believes that marriage and relationship drama are the themes for the last two acts. Questions like “Do you love me?” point to everyday communication problems. The question is, is she right? The move to love and romantic relationships certainly feels very different from the in-your-face treatment of race in the first few acts. From another perspective, however, the theme of the second half of the play can be seen as being about different types of struggle, whether internal or external. Although each of the characters goes home to his or her partner (both homosexual and heterosexual relationships are featured), constant misunderstandings arise within conversations between the individual couples. After performing microaggressions in the public sphere—which should be, but is not *Heimat*—the play retreats into the private space of

[259] Simone Kämpf, “Deutschsein ist schwer,” *Nachkritik*, June 4, 2010, http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4428:heimat-bittersuesse-heimat-ndas-afro-deutsche-label-noir-praesentiert-in-berlin-sein-erstes-theaterprojekt&catid=447&Itemid=100476.

the home. In the process of navigating the world as Afro-Germans, one couple accidentally breaks up. The last couple fights about how little time they spend together, as one comes home from work very late. The partners constantly misunderstand each other and misspeak ("I need more space," "Do you love me?"); one asks his partner the hypothetical question, "Would you cheat on me?" These instances all deal with miscommunication and failed expectations in relationships. This continues the themes of the first act--these well-meaning and good intentions can also have negative results.

Miscommunication and misspeaking are the threads that connect the first and second halves of the play. In the beginning of the play, misspeaking and misunderstandings focus on cases of people believing they are helpful and progressive, when in reality that is not the case; by the end of the play, misunderstandings lead to unnecessary arguments in the intimate realm. The last couple attempts to solve a disagreement by one member offering herself as a *Heimat* to her partner ("Ich würde gern deine Heimat, wenn dass dir Recht ist" [I wold like to be your *Heimat,* if that is okay with you]). The offer to be *Heimat* for a partner reveals the lack of *Heimat* for Afro-Germans. Offering *Heimat* as personal constellation demonstrates a creative re-working of the concept, changing the meaning of *Heimat* from a place to a person. A German *Heimat* is not offered to Afro-Germans who are constantly considered outsiders based on race.

3. Relationship to Heimat

The theme of people as *Heimat* is also foregrounded in the reading of Milagro's poem "Heimat, letzter Versuch" in Act 5. At the beginning of the first scene, the entire ensemble takes turns reciting this poem on stage.[260] *Heimat* is at the center of the play's

[260] For the entire poem, see the appendix.

project; therefore, it is important to understand the meaning behind the word. In his monograph, the first ever in English or German to thoroughly analyze the term *Heimat*, historian Peter Blickle provides *Heimat's* main characteristics:

> *Heimat* is a crucial aspect in German self-perceptions; it represents the fusional anti-Enlightenment thinking in German romanticism; it is the idealization of the pre-modern within the modern; it unites geographic and imaginary concepts of space; it is provincializing, but disalienating, part of German bourgeois culture; it reflects modern German culture's spatialized interiority; it combines territorial claims with a fundamental ethical reassurance of innocence; and to achieve this combination, it uses a patriarchal, gendered way of seeing the world.[261]

Heimat is historical, gendered, and spatial[262] and does not lend itself easily to an English definition. As Blickle explains, it is a patriarchal term in its definition. The use of the term *Heimat* in the title of the play points to the precarious relationship Afro-Germans have to a German *Heimat*. Towards the end of his book, Blickle addresses Turkish German, Jewish German, and East German identity in terms of *Heimat*. Yet, Afro-German identity and *Heimat* is absent. Perhaps through using *Heimat* as a motif in the play, the actors long for a *Heimat*, a notion German audience members can relate to.

In her dissertation, Vanessa Plumly also analyzes the notion of *Heimat*. In her thesis, she argues for a plural consideration of *Heimat/en*: "Afro-German *Heimat/en* are performed as being intersectionally produced in (non-) space/s within the—at times contrasting and at times overlapping—genres of (spoken word) poetry, autobiography,

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[261] Peter Blickle, Heimat: *A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), 2.

[262] Blickle, 15.

theater, hip-hop, and documentary film."[263] Plumly includes music videos, literature, film, and performance as part of her analysis of *Heimat*. She describes the performance of *Heimat* thusly: "Through parody, the original or authentic German *Heimat* and the hegemonic construction of whiteness as connected to national identity is revealed as a copy."[264] In these performances, the traditional notion of *Heimat* is satirized, but Plumly also points to a real problem of the construction of *Heimat* as white.

This is also the case in Plumly's examination of *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*. Plumly describes Milagro's notion of *Heimat as* inclusive.[265] She explains: "The space of German *Heimat* is performed by the Black German ensemble as an inclusively rather than exclusively imagined community—one that calls for the recognition of Afro-Germans in German society, as well as one that marks *Heimat/en* as both individual and collective and (non) spaces/places of pain and healing."[266] Her understanding of the performance of Black German *Heimat/en* allows for what she calls the "plurality and heterogeneity of Black German positionality." There is not one *Heimat*, but instead Plumly speaks of *Heimat/en*; there is not one space, but space/s; there is not one time, but time/s.[267] Plumly's open discourse allows for multiple expressions of Black German *Heimat* across various genres. She interprets the openness as agency on the part of Afro-Germans. "This emphasis placed on *Heimat/en* rather than a singularly imagined *Heimat*,

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[263] Plumly, 5.

[264] Ibid., 10.

[265] Ibid., 121.

[266] Ibid., 10-11.

[267] Ibid., 40.

open up the potential for interpreting *Heimat/en* as situated at the interstices of local/regional and national, but also at the interstices of the national and transnational (here, African diasporic contexts)."[268] This definition of *Heimat* rejects the notion of a city or nation, but instead opens up possibilities for transnational connections. Her open definition of *Heimat* offers hope and freedom for Afro-Germans:

> In a similar fashion, *Heimat* takes on new narrations and meanings, and is placed within an inclusive context that removes it from a violent and hurtful one, turning it into a site of healing and hope, even if it cannot be completely free from the pain of experiences of racism that continue to exist. *Heimat/en* as defined and constructed by Afro-/Black Germans are non-spaces/places that welcome the diversity of German citizens . . . marking *Heimat* as a place of exile from which to mend the wounds imparted by the interconnected discourses of race, nation, gender, and sexuality.[269]

For Plumly, Black Germans have made their own definitions of *Heimat*, a definition that includes them. As Black Germans, they reject the traditional definition of *Heimat*, and they rewrite, redefine and perform *Heimat/en* that accommodates their experiences. The revision of the term includes a non-German space, a space of exile, which is important to considering the performance of *Heimat* in the play.

I agree with Plumly that there is an expansion of the definition of *Heimat* in the play, as well as transnational connections; the end of the poem lands on the notion of *Heimat* in flux, which counters the traditional notion of *Heimat*. This understanding of *Heimat* could further be an intertextual reference to Ayim's poem "Entfernte

[268] Ibid., 41.

[269] Ibid., 71.

Verbindung," in which she uses the term "at home on the road": "daheim unterwegs."[270] In the beginning of the play, *Heimat* is not mentioned explicitly in the first act, but it is implicated over and over in the question "Where do you come from?" *Heimat* is referred to a place that is outside of Germany for the Black female characters. Later in the play, *Heimat* becomes contradictory (with the lack of help for the Muslim man running from neo-Nazis) and finally, *Heimat* becomes a person. The traditional notion of *Heimat* excludes Afro-Germans, as it once excluded Jews and other minorities. In Milagro's poem "Heimat, letzter Versuch," *Heimat* is redefined in terms of memories and feelings, instead of race or landscape.

While the poem mostly follows an ABAB-CDCD rhyme scheme, the actors reject the hexameter rhythm in their performance of the poem. Instead, they focus on the words rather than relying on a satisfying melody, which is another alienation technique borrowed from Brecht.[271] The actors breaking rhyme and meter; the audience does not focus on the completing the rhyme or the rhythm of the poem. This arrangement prevents audiences from completing the poem themselves. Therefore, the audience is not allowed to own the story or process. Label Noir takes a classic poetic form of rhyme and meter to perform it in a completely different way to make an intervention in their definition of *Heimat*. In Milagro's poem, the actors explore the possibility of *Heimat* and also its limits for them as Black/Afro-Germans. The poem contains six stanzas, with a series of subordinated conjunctions, and an additional couplet. Each stanza contains two quatrains rhyming in the second and fourth lines and sixth and eighth lines with no formal rhyme in

[270] This is also the title of Ika Hügel-Marshall's autobiography.

[271] Brecht, "Short Description," 138.

the first and third lines—the only exception is the fifth stanza, which contains sixteen lines. This inconsistency of the length of lines mirrors how *Heimat* is for Afro-Germans—how it changes from something regulated into something more complex. The first four stanzas deal with feeling foreign; the city looks down on the speaker of the poem, as does nature. The speaker then looks to the literary world for comfort, but finds none there, or in language. After dealing with silence and the projections of those around her/him, the speaker defines *Heimat* in last, long stanza five: *Heimat* means to feel language, knowing one's way around town, memories, recognition, and belonging. This new definition of *Heimat* rejects the conventional definition of the German *Heimat*, which itself rejects a Black German identity.[272]

In the poem and likewise in the play, Afro-Germans create a new *Heimat,* a *Heimat* that they are part of. Because the play comes to an end after the actors recite the poem, the notion of *Heimat* being a person can be read as a solution to the problem of the microaggressions experienced at the beginning of the play. By using the word *Heimat*, the actors include themselves in a larger German community by rejecting the traditional exclusionary notion of the term. The play concludes that *Heimat* can be anywhere; *Heimat* is the physical space of the addressee, or wherever the addressee feels at home.

Heimat as a person brings up the notion of a relational *Heimat*.[273] This new *Heimat* could be read as hopeful and a revision of the original term; however, it is

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[272] Many Black Germans have addressed the term *Heimat* in their work. For more information, see Vanessa Plumly's dissertation "BLACK-Red-Gold in 'der bunten Republik.'"

[273] Édouard Glissant discusses this theory in his *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), as a result of slavery and families ripped apart. Here, there is no Middle Passage story, but the necessity of building a

important to also problematize *Heimat* as a person. A relational *Heimat* presents an interesting constellation of identity, based on the family you create yourself, as opposed to a family tree. In this case it also presents issues. The problem with a relational *Heimat* is that *Heimat* becomes white privilege, which Black people in Germany are not afforded, because the conventional sense of German *Heimat* as place is not available to them. *Heimat* as a term is inherently limiting; although everyone has to have a home (or a place to be born), Germany is not accepted as a *Heimat* for the Afro-German actors in the play. Instead, the character's only option is a relational *Heimat*. In their engagement with the inherently oppressive term *Heimat*, the actors engage with something very German and make it more accessible for their histories. The play ends with pictures of the actors with their loved ones—white German and Black German friends and family—who have offered themselves as *Heimat*. During the question and answer period, some audiences see this as more autobiographical and personal than artistic, despite the disclaimer that what the actors present is a fictional account of Black experiences in Germany, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter. The tendency to view the stage performance as only autobiographical illustrates the way in which Black art is constantly devalued and the way Blackness in Germany is a particularity and not universal.

Ayim's is the last projected image shown in the play, with the caption, "Dedicated to May Ayim and those before and after her." Pictures of friends and family are projected on stage at the end of the play. The actors' choice of Ayim's image alongside friends and family is a logical conclusion; Ayim closes the performance perhaps as also a friend and/or family member. She is additionally a literary mother upon which Label Noir

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rhizomatic (and non-blood related) community is similar. Unlike Glissant's theory, the way Label Noir uses it incorporates white German family and friends.

builds their performance. At the same time, she is possibly a loved one, a *Heimat*. The performance comes full circle, returning to the issues of *Heimat* and belonging at the beginning of the play.

D. Reception

The play's five-act format, the production at theater houses, and use of alienation effects suggest the play targets an educated crowd. It expects an audience member who is used to classical theater and can make some connections on his/her own. In my attendance of the play in Hamburg, at an independent theater house, and in Nuremberg at a culture center, the audience members at this play were ninety percent white in Hamburg, and ninety percent Black in Nuremberg. Interestingly enough, in the Q&A after the play, both audiences focused on the second half of the play and on the actors as people and not as artists; the jump between the first and second act was too much. The play concludes with pictures of the actors together with their white friends, family members, and loved ones, mirroring the concluding poem and theme of people providing *Heimat* for one another. From my experience at the Q&A, it was clear that both audiences fixated on the fact that they were seeing Black actors on stage.

Some reviews and audience response did understand parts of the play, while others thus reflected the reception of the play as a representation of real life experiences and not an artistic work. Reviews of the play focus largely on aspects of race,[274] but not on the plot or the details acted out on stage. In the *TAZ*, Ariane Lemme writes, "Dabei bleibt einem bei vielen Szenen das Lachen auch im Hals stecken, man fühlt sich ertappt.

[274] "Presse," Label Noir, http://www.labelnoir.net/theater-1/heimat-bitters%C3%BC%C3%9Fe-heimat/presse/.

Denn die Vorurteile, mit denen sich 'Heimat bittersüße Heimat' auseinandersetzt, sind nicht die der 'bösen Seite,' der Nazis. Es ist die Ignoranz der vermeintlich aufgeklärten, vielleicht sogar linken Mittelschicht, das politisch korrekt verpackte Unverständnis des Bürgertums" [With this, laughter is stuck in your throat as you feel caught. Because the prejudices that *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* deals with are not from evil Nazis. Instead, it is the ignorance of the enlightened, maybe even the liberals, the politically correct failure to understand of the bourgeoisie].[275] In addition, Alexa Dvorson in *Deutsche Welle* expresses a similar sentiment: "While the scenes are at times painfully funny, they're also confrontational, compelling the audience to rethink its assumptions about what it means to live in an ethnically diverse society. Old prejudices wrapped in politically correct platitudes can be just as offensive as ignorance-based slurs." For Dvorson, this play does not allow any audience member to escape judgment. She says, "As the audience is invited to 'witness' such burdened interactions from the perspective of a person of color, individuals might come away with a sinking feeling that some of their own well-meaning comments in the past may have come back to haunt them."[276]

However, other reviewers did not see the connection between the two halves of the play. The split from the first half to a relatable second half is too much for some audiences. The disengagement from the topic of racism in the second half made the play more personal. The identifiable topic of love and interpersonal relationships in the second half allowed some audience members not to feel implicated in the racism portrayed in the

[275] Ariana Lemme, "Warten auf das schöne Leben," *TAZ*, October 4, 2010, http://www.taz.de/!5134587/.

[276] Dvorson, "Theater ensemble."

first few acts. Andrea Schneider in the article "Die Frage nach dem Gutsein" also references a lack of racial issues in the second half of the play. Reviewer Schneider perceives the focus to be on love and faithfulness.[277] Simone Kämpf in a review from the June 4, 2010 article "Deutsch sein ist schwer" believes, like these previous other reviewers, that the first half of the play deals with race but the second half does not: "doch hat der zweite Teil des Abends mit der Hautfarbe rein gar nichts mehr zu tun" [the second half of the play does not have anything at all to do with skin color].[278] Lalon Sander views the play similarly, "Die Hautfarben der Paare sind nicht mehr erkennbar, obwohl man sich doch daran gewöhnt hat, über die niedlich-dummen Fragen der weißen Figuren zu lachen" [The skin color of the couples are no longer recognizable, although the audience is used to laughing at the dumb questions of the white characters].[279] Encountering a full cast of Black people on stage for the first time, the audience members couldn't interact with the play beyond the issue of race and the daily lives of these actors in Germany.

Perhaps due to the length of the play, not all audience members stayed for the question and answer period after the production. Questions and comments during this period revolved around meta-issues of the performance—such as, "I've never seen Black actors on stage, let alone an entire cast"—or questions about their personal lives and experiences, instead of about the actors' craft as artists. The focus lies then on the actors as individuals in society, instead of their professional performance of the life of Afro-

[277] Schneider, "Die Frage nach dem Gutsein."

[278] Kämpf, "Deutsch sein ist schwer."

[279] Lalon Sander, "Der herrlich absurde Alltag," *TAZ*, June 18, 2010, http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/digitaz/artikel/?ressort=ku&dig=2010%2F06%2F18%2Fa0093&cHash=b50c2cad18.

Germans in Germany. Black artists, then, are not given the same luxury as white artists; Black actors of Label Noir cannot be artists, but instead stand in for laypeople describing their daily interactions to a crowd.

During the Q &A, some audience members also felt the need to congratulate themselves on attending the performance. In Hamburg, a white German spectator commented that he used to be a neo-Nazi, implying that he had come a long way and deserved acknowledgement for attending the play. This white spectator made the entire two-hour production created by Afro-Germans about him; he failed to empathize or show compassion for the Afro-German stories told on stage. This is the difficult aspect in incorporating alienation effects in the play: not all audience members will understand the theme or goals of the play simply because not everything is explained.[280]

E. Conclusion

Using the stage in independent theater houses, Label Noir pushes the audience into introspection and investigation of their own attitudes towards Afro-Germans and other People of Color in Germany. Label Noir centralizes women in the discussion of race on stage while rearticulating Ayim's ideas from "afro-deutsch I" and "afro-deutsch II" and performing oppressive stereotypes. In the performance of *Heimat,* Black German women are affirmed and reaffirmed. Actors take racialized moments to discuss the intersection of race and nation. *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* engages the audience by calling their ideas of Blackness in Germany into question by using not only African diasporic influences (clothing, dance, and images), but also the Brechtian notions of alienation to mirror the conversations in reverse so that the (white and Black) German

[280] I will go into more of this in the next chapter when I discuss the play *Also by Mail* (2013).

audience is on the receiving end of the question of belonging. This form offers multiple extreme cases for the audience to see—hopefully, but not necessarily—their own misconceptions about race.

However, Label Noir chooses audience identification at some points of the play, which goes against Brecht's rejection of empathy and emotion. Instead the actors make identifiable claims about relationships. These relationship issues are not resolved but left for the audience to think through. In the end, the only *Heimat* constellation possible is that between loved ones. Though *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat* imagines collective change with the M-straße street sign, the play ends with uncertainty. The play supplies no answer to the question it proposes at the beginning of the play: "Wer/Was ist ein guter Mensch?" [Who or what is a good person?]. Or perhaps the answer is: "Ich weiß nicht" [I don't know], as Milagro states in a video in the play. The unresolved narrative hangs in the air, but it is still possible to draw certain conclusions. The group of professional actors performs the multiple ways a German *Heimat* is denied to them; simultaneously they revise the definition of the term, uplift Black female voices, and share the microaggressions experienced by the Black community. In the next chapter, questions of *Heimat* and belonging continue, but instead of through a series of vignettes, the author uses a linear narrative to tell the story of two siblings. Because the narrative focus is on two individuals, the next chapter shifts to specific stories of Afro-Germans, instead of the general experiences discussed in chapters two and three.

CHAPTER IV

RACE OUT OF PLACE: *Also by Mail* (2013)

A. Introduction

Olumide Popoola is an Afro-German author and spoken word performer based in London. She co-edited a collection of poems, *Talking Home*,[281] in 1996, a novella, *This is not about sadness*,[282] in 2010, and the short story "Fishing for Naija" (2015).[283] She is the co-author of *breach* (2016),[284] which thematizes narratives of displacement from the perspective of six refugees. This chapter focuses on her play, *Also by Mail* (2013). It was written in English as part of the Witnessed series for a wider-African diaspora readership. The title encapsulates the book's themes of crossing borders and correspondence with loved ones across boundaries. The play seeks to spread awareness in the English language about racism in Germany.[285] Additionally, it offers an example of German literature in English. In the foreword to *Also by Mail*, editor Sharon Otoo describes Popoola's talent: "Popoola neatly captures the tensions between the generations and the

[281] Olumide Popoola and Beldan Sezdan, eds., *Talking Home: Heimat aus unserer eigenen Feder: Frauen of Color in Deutschland* (Amsterdam: Blue Moon Press, 1999).

[282] Popoola, *This is not about sadness* (Münster: Unrast, 2010). While I understand the rules of titles in the English language, Popoola herself refers to her novella in lowercase. Out of respect, I will do the same for *breach* and *this is not about sadness*. This rejection of English rules of grammar is then purposeful on Popoola's part, and I acknowledge that rejection by acceding to her usage.

[283] Popoola, "Fishing for Naija," *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 116-33.

[284] Popoola and Annie Holmes, *breach* (London: Peirene Press, 2016).

[285] Sharon Otoo, foreword, *Also by Mail* (Münster: Edition Assemblage, 2013), 9.

contrasting journeys of Africans in the diaspora while also exploring diverse strategies of resisting racism in Germany."[286] *Also by Mail* is the first Afro-German play to feature Afro-German siblings and the first Afro-German play to be published. This play concentrates on one story, and by doing so, Popoola explores an underrepresented group with Nigerian heritage.

The two-act play focuses on a family after the father's death and takes place in Germany and Nigeria. Popoola addresses many things at once—family, gender, racism—at the same time calling on a literary mother, Lorraine Hansberry. The potential of the diaspora in the play works on multiple levels. It is included here through diasporic iconography. In the play, diasporic iconography appears as intertextual citations of literature, dialect and music. References to Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* facilitate the interrogation of home and who is allowed to call certain spaces home. The use of the British English, Nigerian Pidgin English, American English, and German accents in English deal with setting. The use of English also aids in access to Popoola's project; using English means more people will be able to read about the experiences of the Afro-German protagonists. English makes the play transparent, which Popoola mirrors from the work of Afro-German poet May Ayim. A citation of the 1990's hit hip-hop song "Mo Money More Problems" mirrors the layers expressed in the play through sampling. As Diddy samples a Diana Ross hit, Popoola samples Hansberry. Further, the song offers an example of how the dead continue to live and speak into the lives of the living; the song's main attribution is to Notorious B.I.G., who died months earlier. Similarly, the father has a voice after his death through speaking in a dream to his

[286] Ibid.

malaria-stricken daughter. Finally, the experiences of the father and the siblings, his children, in different diasporas of Germany and Nigeria respectively, reference notions of belonging and home. The play as a whole can also be read as the story of everyday microaggressions against Black Germans, addressing timely issues such as racial profiling on public transportation. The conflict in the plot is resolved using the diasporic trope of ancestral spirits.

I argue that intertextuality brings the diaspora into this play to tell the story of a modern Afro-German family in a transparent but complex style. This style of transparency allows the audience to get a clear perspective on Popoola's message. The play focuses on a single story that empowers Afro-German siblings without the possibility for misinterpretation. Intertextuality, specifically diasporic iconography, appears in the play through references to Lorraine Hansberry, Notorious B.I.G. and the trope of ancestral spirits. By doing this, Popoola creates a trajectory for herself as a playwright and author following Hansberry, and she also utilizes the idea of afterlife in literature and music. First in this chapter, I will discuss the performances, then I will summarize the play. I will then discuss intertextuality found utilizing transparency in terms of language with reference to May Ayim and the musicians. Lastly, I will analyze the play's themes of belonging and home by examining Popoola's use of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

B. Staging the Play

Popoola financed the two-act play with the German crowdfunding platform Startnext.de. There have been four staged readings of the play: in Hamburg, Berlin-

Kreuzberg, Frankfurt/Main, and Luton (south of London). With seven actors on a stage sitting in front of microphones, these performances were rehearsed staged readings. Running two hours, the play ends with a question and answer period. Tickets to the plays cost around five Euros; the staged readings have so far taken place in small, independent theater houses such as Westwerk in Hamburg, Circus in Frankfurt and the English Theater Berlin. It is important to note that these spaces are not traditional theater houses, but instead home to improvisational theater, music performances, experimental theater, and cultural events. These locations do not offer classical plays, are not state funded, and are not traditional in any sense of the word. There is freedom and possibility outside the state-run theater framework. Cultural houses and independent theaters are spaces that foster and allow for innovation and unique perspectives. This type of grassroots theater offers a space, literally and figuratively, for radical openness.

C. The Story

Popoola's play begins with The Musicians, who act as a chorus in the play, explaining background information and providing commentary on the dramatic action. They also occasionally interject themselves into the play to explain plot points. In the play, two Afro-German siblings, Wale and Funke, travel to Nigeria for their father's funeral.[287] The father's will has been misplaced. Multiple extended family members assume that he left a large sum of money in his will. The anticipated money at stake causes tension for the extended family. Wale is too emotional, hurt, and angry at his father's funeral to take on his expected role as eldest son, and Funke, as a woman, is too

[287] Though their family names Ogunleye is a royal Yoruba name, their royalty is never explicitly mentioned in the play. For more information, see David Haugh, "Newest Bear a Man Who Could Be King," *Chicago Tribune*, August 23, 2004.

candid and opinionated for her Nigerian uncle. During his father's funeral service, Wale is forced to take a leadership role as the oldest son. Uncle Bola urges Wale to speak, and he opts to say a prayer in German for his father. The guests are outraged. Angry with everyone including his sister, Wale leaves for Germany. Assuming he is not German, the ticket inspector on a regional train harasses Wale about his passport (which is German). The ticket inspector then presses charges because Wale yells that this is probably the way the SS operated. The police throw Wale in jail, and after he is released Wale presses charges against the policemen and the train workers. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, Funke falls ill and her father, Mr. Ogunleye, comes to her in a dream. In the dream, he explains that he left Germany because of racism—something he had always hidden from the children. Fearing Funke will not survive the illness, Wale returns to Nigeria. When she awakes, Funke tells Wale about her dream, and it brings them together. Funke admits to Wale that she found the will that everyone was looking for, and she hid it again. Once another family member (re)discovers it, the will is read aloud. It only contains a quote regarding inheritance from Lorraine Hansberry's seminal play *A Raisin in the Sun* (Asagai: "Was it your money he gave away? Beneatha: It belonged to all of us."). The play ends with Mr. Ogunleye's spirit overturning a law that allows racial profiling on trains in Germany.[288]

D. Transparency

1. Transparency in Writing

Popoola's language in the play is clear and transparent. This is intended to reduce the possibility for readers to misinterpret the message of the play. May Ayim's influence is very much present in Popoola's style. Ayim's poetry mostly focuses on the themes of

[288] For Popoola's summary of the play, see the back few pages of *Also by Mail*.

family, race in Germany, politics, and friendship. Ayim uses very precise language and a conversational tone in her poetry. She has political purposes for doing this: her language makes her poetry accessible to a wide audience and not only scholars of poetry. Her poem "grenzenlos und unverschämt," for example, illustrates her accessible style:

> ich werde trotzdem
> afrikanisch sein
> auch wenn ihr
> mich gerne
> deutsch
> haben wollt
> und werde trotzdem
> deutsch sein
> auch wenn euch
> meine schwärze
> nicht passt
> ich werde noch einen schritt weitergehen
> bis an den äußersten rand
> wo meine schwestern sind--wo meine brüder stehen
> wo
> unsere FREIHEIT beginnt
> ich werde noch einen schritt weitergehen und noch einen schritt
> weiter
> und wiederkehren
> wann
> ich will
> wenn
> ich will
> grenzenlos und unverschämt
> bleiben.[289]

The poem is presented in one stanza, comprising three sentences with multiple conjunctions and without punctuation. Noteworthy is Ayim's use of the subordinating conjunctions, *wann* and *wenn* (when and if), because they occupy an entire line. With the repetition of "ich will," the speaker takes a stance of empowerment. This poem is

[289] May Ayim, "grenzenlos und unverschämt," in *Blues in schwarz weiß* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1990), 48.

particularly moving because of the narrator's strong position; s/he is stakes out a place for her/himself. The poem is proud, determined, and straightforward. Its sense of clarity is like other Black German literature;[290] the message in the poem is clear.

The poem's theme of being borderless and brazen is also evident in Popoola's play, through travel from Germany to Nigeria, and the main characters' personalities. The title –"grenzenlos und unverschämt"— empowers Black German identities regardless of others' opinions and ideas. The poem calls for pushing boundaries and going further and further, claiming one's own identity and claiming agency. Similarly, in Popoola's play, Wale stakes a claim for his identity as Black in Germany, and as German in Nigeria. This poem is evoked in the play because it shows his own desire to go further and to take his claim for his rights further.

Popoola's writing is also very transparent, explicitly dealing with the topics of family and *das Schwarzsein* in Germany that Ayim engages in her poetry. At the back of Popoola's play, readers can find a plot summary, discussion questions, and short character summaries, helping to make the play accessible not only to non-native speakers of English, but also to a younger audience. The supplemental information makes the play egalitarian, as it is easier for multiple audiences to understand. Popoola has a specific agenda and wants the play to be read a certain way. The clear language, summaries, and accessibility show that Popoola is writing for a popular audience.

2. English

This said, why did Popoola choose to write *Also by Mail* in English? English can be used to negotiate German culture. It is true that colonial languages, like English,

[290] *Farbe bekennen* is a great example of clarity in Afro-German literature.

German, French, and Spanish, are problematic. In her poetry, Dionne Brand writes that "no language is neutral."[291] However, Black Germans take an empowered stance in writing in multiple languages, as shown by the poetry collection *Talking Home* (1999) and the use of English in the creative works selected for the May Ayim Award Collection (2004) and Philipp Khabo Köpsell's edited collections: *Afro-Shop* (2014), *Arriving in the Future* (2014), and *The Afropean Contemporary* (2015). In the "Foreword" to the May Ayim Award collection (entitled *May Ayim Award*), Michael Küppers and Angela Alagiyawanna-Kadalie explain the importance of accepting artistic contributions in other languages besides German: "Die Ausschreibung des Preises über nationale Grenzen und Sprachräume hinweg ist ein sinnstiftender, kultureller Überlebensreflex von Menschen der schwarzen Diaspora" [The Call for Proposals for the Prize disregarding national boundaries and languages is a meaningful cultural survival method].[292] Further, Sharon Otoo, as the editor of the Witnessed series, solicits Afro-German work in English.

Popoola writes in English and lives in England. This does not make her any less German or the play less German, as it takes place in Germany and deals with two siblings born and raised in Germany and holding German passports. However, English is one of the primary languages of the diaspora. English is potentially more powerful than German because it reaches more people; further, English can be owned by anyone.[293] This is not

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[291] Dionne Brand, "No Language is Neutral," in *Fierce Departures: The Poetry of Dionne Brand* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 1.

[292] Michael Küppers and Angela Alagiyawanna-Kadalie, "Macht der Nacht II," in *May Ayim Award* (Berlin: Orlanda, 2004), 10.

[293] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explained that African literature and performance should be written in native languages instead of English, because of his target audience. However, when he theorizes or analyzes, he writes in English to engage with other scholars. Ngũgĩ uses English, but not to write creative literature. In his Troy Lecture at the University of

the case with German. When minority authors such as Yoko Tawada write in German, the expectation is that she does something to the German language that she can never own.[294]

English is, therefore, more effective for reaching larger audiences. Although some characters in *Also by Mail* speak German, English is the central language. The play sidelines German through its deliberate use of English, rendering German insignificant. Although Popoola can speak the German language, she does not have to. Instead, English offers a space of negotiation, a middle ground to forge a new identity. Rejecting German is also subversive, as was reflected during the 2004 May Ayim Award ceremony and in the *Talking Home* poetry collections, for which submissions in any language were accepted. Popoola's poem for the award, like her poems in the *Talking Home* collection, blend English and German and offer great examples of bilingual poetry. English, as a world language, can express the experiences of Afro-Germans to a German and non-German audience in a way that German cannot. Like Ayim, who spoke and performed in English (and German), Popoola intentionally formats her literature so that it reaches the widest number of people possible.

Popoola employs various types of English in the play: British and American English, as well as Nigerian Pidgin. Wale and Funke speak British English, while their brother speaks American English. Audiences can interpret the function of British English

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Massachusetts Amherst, Ngũgĩ argues that people are punished for writing in their own native language and asserts, "Nature is not monolingual." Popoola, as far as I know, does not speak a native Nigerian language such as Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba but does speak its official language, English. Still, she does show a diversity of English, while at the same time destabilizing German.

[294] Yoko Tawada said this herself during a reading in Freiburg, Germany, "Durchwanderte Texte: Langer Abend der Poesie," author reading along with Marica Bodrozic, Ulijana Wolf and Claudia Dathe, Freiburg, Germany, July 2, 2011.

in the performance as a reminder of British colonial power, but the play inverts British stereotypes of colonial dominance through the siblings Wale and Funke. American English is also represented in the play through their younger half-brother, Lanre, who studies at Yale. He appears far less in the play, making the neo-colonial U.S.A. occupy far less space. The final use of English in this play is Nigerian Pidgin, which is spoken by the musicians. Popoola thus contributes to the ongoing debate about Pidgin English as a language in its own right.[295] There are rare instances of Pidgin in literature, and these tend to be in the mouths of characters who are considered jokesters. Instead of placing this dialect in the play to be laughed at, mocked, or belittled,[296] Popoola gives these Pidgin speaking characters a special role as the chorus in relaying information to the audience and navigating the passage between the living and the dead.

The use of multiple English dialects reveals both differences between characters and Popoola's talent as a writer. Furthermore, on stage, the sound qualities of difference are highlighted for audience members. The characters speak variations of the same source: English. Within one language, we see changes depending on location and history. Connecting Germany, the United States, and Nigeria, Popoola points to the various routes taken that have the same root.[297] The use of English points to colonialism and neo-

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[295] For more information, see Ike S. Ndolo, "The Case for Promoting the Nigerian Pidgin" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 27, no. 4 (1989): 679-84, and also Bernard Mafeni's "Nigerian Pidgin," in *The English Language in West Africa*, ed. John Spencer, (London: Longman, 1971), 95-112.

[296] Ndolo, 683.

[297] In the *Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Paul Gilroy theorizes about identity based on routes (which one takes), and roots (heritage). His focus is Middle Passage slavery, but I believe that Popoola articulates something similar through the variety of dialects.

colonialism, but also to a regeneration of the language with Nigerian Pidgin as a newly created language. These multiple forms of English meet in Nigeria and thus push the Western nations to the periphery.

3. Transparency in Performance

The musicians in *Also by Mail* also perform an important role regarding transparency for the audience and in terms of diaspora. Musicians in the play function like a Greek chorus. As Aristotle wrote on the duty of the chorus in theater in *Poetics*: "The chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole and share in the action." [298] The chorus was an important tool for eighteenth and nineteenth century German authors as well. Simon Goldhill explains the German Idealists' view of the chorus: "By displaying its own pain, the chorus mitigates the audience's pain, and reaches a calmer, more serene reflection of the hero's condition: the spectator was guided toward more serene reflection and thereby relieved, as it were, of the feeling of pain by that feeling being placed into an object and presented there as already mitigated.'"[299] The chorus is thus on stage to relieve the audience; the chorus shows the spectator how to feel and how to think. The chorus is supposed to induce the contemplative reflection in the spectator.[300] Constanze Güthenke also describes Schiller's chorus as a mediator:

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[298] Aristotle, "Prologue," in *Poetics* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 15.

[299] Simon Goldhill, "The Greek Chorus: Our German Eyes," in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

[300] Goldhill, 40.

> For Schiller, the chorus's function lies in creating distance and closeness at the same time: as a prompt to reflection, it creates the characteristically modern distance that allows for *Bildung*, and a certain "ennobling" of the audience's pleasure, in short a form of freedom (certainly in Schiller's understanding of the term). At the same time, the chorus as a fundamentally "alien" element is also the only one that might allow us any insight and way into understanding ancient tragedy . . . [301]

For Schiller, the chorus thus taught audience members how to react to certain scenes and events; the chorus is part of the *Bildung* [education] that theater provides for the emerging class of the *Bürgertum* [bourgeoisie]. Several German Idealists utilized the chorus in particular for nation building. Schlegel, as a nationalist, believed that the chorus and tragedy were inherently tied to German national culture. Goldhill explains the connection of chorus and nation:

> Schlegel is not saying that the chorus simply gets things right, and serenely watches, and thereby tells us how to react. Rather, he is contributing to what he thinks an ideal engagement with art looks like, an engagement from a nationalist perspective that finds in tragedy an authoritative statement about the world.[302]

The chorus is not only an example, but also shows a model of engagement with the piece and a model for thinking. It is up to the audience not to mimic the chorus, but instead to emulate the approach and style of the chorus, as it offers reconciliation with the dramatic action and art. The chorus does not only stand in for the audience member, but also

[301] Constanze Güthenke, "The Middle Voice: German Classical Scholarship and the Greek Tragic Chorus," in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, 57.

[302] Goldhill, 40.

shows audience members how to engage with art and reconcile this art with nation. Goldhill explains: "There is something especially *vaterländisch* about the chorus."[303]

This nationalistic quality of the chorus was essential for creating a German national mood and sentiment to unite a group of people into an actual nation, before Germany existed. Here we see that Popoola uses the element of the choir, but adjusts it slightly for her purposes. Popoola uses the German Idealist form of chorus in order to make judgments about the nation, not to support nationalism, but instead to go beyond the nation. Popoola's chorus does not attempt to solidify a German identity. Instead, her chorus creates identity transnationally, within the African diaspora.

The musicians are both inside and outside of the play; they are characters of the play, and they are audience members. Popoola enacts a diegetic form, in which the musicians recount parts of the story for audience members. Within the plot, they also function inside and outside the spiritual realm and reality (in the stage play). They explain plot points in the play outside, attend the funeral, and work for the ghost of Mr. Ogunleye in the spiritual realm. In this sense, they act as mediators between the audience and the action. They show how audience members should react to the train conductor's harassment of Wale on the train. They navigate the various spaces in the play: the Musicians are in Germany and listen to the lawyer speak to Wale, they also speak to Lanre, and finally, they navigate the spirit world by speaking to Mr. Ogunleye. The musicians narrate and comment on the story. When Wale prays in German during his father's funeral, Musician 1 says, "This one na mistake o," which leads the audience to believe that praying in German was the problem. However, Musician 1 also judges the

[303] Ibid.

Ogunleye family for interrupting Wale's prayer.[304] They comment on Uncle Bola's relationship with the children by playing a "jolly song" to mock him.[305] Finally, they make the play more communal; they tease the German conductor by making fun of his accent and act as a mediating force between the audience and the play.

The musicians narrate the plot and at times explain the instances of injustice in case the audience does not understand. Popoola creates a break from the past by creating a new type of chorus with these musicians. According to stage directions at the start of the play, Popoola's musicians are always found outdoors. Unlike a traditional Greek chorus, they speak individually, and they are incorporated into the major parts of the play. For example, they read Mr. Ogunleye's will and the landmark court decision Mr. Ogunleye gives to them. This is important for the audience to see the chorus navigate the real world and the spirit world. The musicians also function as bookends for the play, as the play begins and ends with them ("Musician 1: You hear weatin happen for Oga?"/Musican 1: Leave am o!").[306]

Popoola begins and ends the play with the chorus, who traditionally represent the larger community. In a play about specific protagonists, it is interesting that Popoola begins and ends with community. At the beginning of the play, they explain the background for the audience: Mr. Ogunleye has died, and he has a rough relationship with his children. They appear again in Scene 4 to explain to each other the disagreement between Wale and Uncle Bola ("You see am?/Wetin I see?/You never notice am? My

[304] Popoola, *Also by Mail*, 32.

[305] Ibid., 31.

[306] Ibid., 15 and 80.

friend, tell me./De way this one go./Which one?/Uncle and Wale") and they mock Uncle Bola with their music because they are sympathetic to Wale's character and not Uncle Bola.[307] The chorus also breaks down the legal language and problems of racism Wale encountered in Germany:

> Musician 2: I no understand dis lawyer wey him talk.
> Musician 1: This Jamney situation tell him he no be same as other Jamney man.
> Musician 2: How you mean.
> Musician 1: Make you see. Wale enter de train, dem stop am, tell am him no fit dey for de country…
> Musician 2: But e get Jamney passport. Dem born am for Jamney.[308]

The musician does not understand why Wale has problems in Germany because, for him, Wale is German: he has a German passport and was born there. His misunderstanding is intended to perform the ridiculousness of racial profiling that Wale experiences on the train.

While transparency is a major theme of the play, there is also opacity in this play in terms of language. For instance, in the above dialogue, the musicians speak Nigerian Pidgin. For audiences, Nigerian Pidgin can be a boundary to comprehension; if a spectator does not know about Nigerian culture, s/he experiences cultural exclusion. Nigerian terms such as *oyinbo* (European) and *Oga* (boss man) are not glossed,[309] but instead are expected to be understood. It is thus helpful, but not required for an audience member to have some sort of cultural understanding of Nigeria. It relegates those who

[307] Ibid., 31.

[308] Ibid., 52.

[309] Ibid., 15.

don't to an outsider position, mirroring the way the siblings are treated as outsiders in Nigeria. This by no means prohibits an audience member unfamiliar with Nigeria from fully apprehending the still very transparent plot and themes of the play.

4. Transparency and Diaspora

Music also plays a large role in the play. Music does not alienate audiences. Instead, it is used more conventionally. Music underlines the points the audience is meant to understand. The musicians play drums, including the American song "Mo' Money Mo' Problems" (1997) by Notorious B.I.G. (featuring Mase and Puff Daddy, also known as Diddy and Sean Combs), repeatedly during the play. (Here is the first of many connections to Lorraine Hansberry's work, as Sean Combs played Walter Lee in the 2004 Broadway production of *A Raisin in the Sun*.) Returning to Popoola's use of Combs' 1990s hit, the intertext of "Mo' Money Mo'Problems" is initially supposed to be unintelligible to the audience, however, because it is only played on the drums until the end of the play, when a recording of the beat is played along with the musicians' drumming.[310] The refrain lyrics are: "I don't know what/ they want from me/It's like the more money we come across/the more problems we see."[311] The content of the song underlies the message of the play. This is key to the play's treatment of money, considering the Ogunleye family's obsession with money. Evoking a 1990s nostalgia among the audience, the song presents an interesting mix that is reflected itself in Popoola's play. While Popoola borrows from Hansberry, Diddy samples the Diana Ross

[310] Popoola, "Prologue," 9.

[311] Notorious B.I.G., "Mo' Money Mo' Problems," featuring Mase and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, Bad Boy/Arista Records, released 1997, lyrics accessed December 10, 2013, http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/notoriousbig/momoneymoproblems.html

hit "I'm Coming Out" from 1980, which also connects to the play's theme of money with the possible inheritance from Mr. Ogunleye. (Ross left Berry Gordy and Motown Records allegedly for more financial and personal freedom.) Further, it mirrors the play's use of a deceased loved-one as a major character. By the time Diddy's song debuted, B.I.G. had been shot in Los Angeles; yet the song appears on his posthumously released record *Life After Death*.[312] As the father in the play delivers the last words of the play, B.I.G. raps the last verse. Both B.I.G. and Mr. Ogunleye have agency even after death. Using a song from the diaspora, Popoola shows that there is indeed a way for the dead to speak using music.

There is tension between clarity and opacity in this intertextual reference. The connections the song makes to Diana Ross and Berry Gordy are apparent for those with a knowledge of music history. Further, the use of B.I.G.'s song evokes the late 1990s and early 2000s era of African American hip-hop. However, audience members who are not familiar with the song or history do not lose; they can still enjoy the song and the revealing of the entire song at the end of the play (as it is later made transparent). By revealing the song at the end, Popoola puts the onus on the audience member to educate themselves instead of drawing those connections on stage.

E. Intertextuality and Diaspora

1. Hansberry

Popoola chooses to reference a queer, African-American, female playwright as she engages with the theme of family strife in *Also by Mail*. Lorraine Hansberry was a complicated figure, as Michael Anderson explains:

[312] Sharon Waxman, "A Notorious B.I.G. Open Case," *Washington Post*, April 17, 2002.

> In her life, Lorraine Hansberry was confronted with social contradiction. She was black in a white world, the child of privilege in the slums, a bohemian from a bourgeois family, a woman in a male supremacy, a lesbian in a society that declared homosexuality an illness, an artist in a philistine country.[313]

The many layers of Hansberry's identity are reflected in the many layers of her work. *A Raisin in the Sun* is revolutionary for being the first play to portray African Americans on the stage as real people. Hansberry scholar Lisbeth Lipari explains the importance of the play for its time: "As Hansberry herself has noted, until *Raisin*, never before had white people seen black characters talking together outside the presence of whites, nor had any audiences, black or white, seen African Americans portrayed on the screen with dignity, humanity, and complexity."[314] For the first time, a play centered around African Americans, instead of relegating African Americans to side characters.

Popoola takes this revolutionary play about average Black people to overtly perform intertextuality by using a dialogue from Hansberry's play. Popoola directly cites Lorraine Hansberry's lines in the father's last words to the family in his will, by featuring a conversation between Asagai and Beneatha in Act III of *A Raisin in the Sun*:

> Asagai: Was it your money?
> Beneatha: What?
> Asagai: Was it your money he gave away?
> Beneatha: It belonged to all of us.

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[313] Michael Anderson, "'Education of Another Kind': Lorraine Hansberry in the 1950s," in *Gender and Nonconformity, Race and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*, ed. Toni Lester (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 215.

[314] Lisbeth Lipari, "Fearful of the Written Word," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 1 (February 2004): 97.

Popoola uses the above as a direct quote in her play. However, the conversation continues in *Raisin,* thusly:

> Asagai: But did you earn it? Would you have had it at all if your father had not died?
> Beneatha: No.
> Asagai: Then isn't there something wrong in a house—in a world—where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man? . . ."[315]

This part of the conversation does not appear in Popoola's play, and by omitting the rest of the dialogue, Popoola writes in opacity. The audience does not lose out by not knowing, but would gain a fuller picture of the quote by knowing the rest of the dialogue. The continued conversation between Beneatha and Asagai is an example of familial obsession with money. Hansberry's play shows that in the diaspora money symbolized upward mobility, but it is also a burden for the Younger family when the son squanders the money. As in *A Raisin in the Sun,* the family in *Also by Mail* is divided in terms of who should inherit Mr. Ogunleye's money and how much of it. The relatives are all eager to receive their share of his money; however, the children are not interested in money. With this money, the extended family members in *Also by Mail* see the chance to improve their financial situation. In this case and in *Raisin,* the death of a family member results in financial gain and therefore more opportunity for those who inherit the deceased family member's money.

On a more touching note, these words in Mr. Ogunleye's final will and testament show that he listened to his children: Funke had recommended Hansberry's play to her

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[315] Loraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun,* in *A Raisin in the Sun; and the Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window,* ed. Robert Nemiroff (New York: Plume, 1987), 134-35 and Popoola, 76-77.

father years before and had not known he read it until the reading of the will. This moment makes a comment about Mr. Ogunleye as a father. On a superficial level, he appears to be an absent father who left his children in Germany. However, it turns out that his story in Germany is more complex than that. Although he was estranged from them and they grew up without him around, this quote found in the will shows that he listened to what his children had to say. His last words allow his children to understand him at last.

2. Negotiating Home

Home and diaspora are important themes in Popoola's play, as elsewhere in literature by Black Germans. In her book, *European Others*, Black German feminist Fatima El-Tayeb theorizes diaspora and home though a queer lens. In her discussion of Afro-Germans she writes: "I focus on the ways in which the implicit tensions of (diaspora) nationalism are made explicit in the case of Afro-Germans, whose presence appears as oxymoronic within the nation and as equally dissonant within the diaspora narrative."[316] Scholars of the African diaspora rarely discuss the Afro-German experience with reference to the diaspora because their existence is troubling both in and outside the nation. As I said in Chapter I utilizing Wright's theories, the most dominant narrative is one that stems from the Middle Passage. El-Tayeb explains that Afro-Germans depart from "essentialist concepts of home toward an embracing of these disidentifications."[317] They are received differently in different spaces. El-Tayeb continues, "The black consciousness movement in Germany represented the attempt to create a past and a

[316] Fatima El-Tayeb, "Dimensions of Diaspora," in *European Others,* 61.

[317] Ibid.

collective memory within the nation but simultaneously beyond it, claiming that to do one without the other is impossible."[318] This shows that diasporic iconography and intertextuality are necessary for Afro-Germans to build a wider collective memory. El-Tayeb references the theme of home in analyzing the prologue in the queer poetry collection *Talking Home*: "Reading the texts it became obvious that 'home' was a dominant theme . . . We all seem to be familiar with this: not belonging. This never being able to 'be whole,' always searching, metaphorically 'homeless.'"[319]

Popoola's play shows the lack of home. The siblings are not at home in Nigeria, and Wale's encounter with the border patrol on the train shows that he is also not considered German. Popoola has previously taken up this topic in her poem "Nigeria," in which she describes that as an Afro-German, home is nowhere for her: "I'm not at home / still not at home / not my country / just my origin / one of my origins."[320] Popoola defines Nigeria not as her origin or home, but as just one of many. In the poem, there is the expectation that Nigeria was supposed to be considered her only home.

Home, or rather the search for and (re)construction of a home, is also a motif in Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin*. Kristin Matthews explains, "*Raisin* calls for the rebuilding of a 'house divided'-- a building of and from diverse materials and labours."[321] The theme of home is a thread in Hansberry's play in terms of occupying a home in a white

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[318] Ibid.

[319] Olumide Popoola and Belzen Sezan, eds., *Talking Home*, 1, qtd. in El-Tayeb, 73.

[320] Olumide Popoola, "Nigeria," in *Talking Home*, 54.

[321] Kristen Matthews, "The Politics of 'Home' in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*," *Modern Drama* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 560.

neighborhood. Lisbeth Lipari's article, "Hanberry's Hidden Transcript," deals with the play *Raisin* in the context of "white racist terror."[322] In the article, she asks, "is home a return or a restoration; is it elsewhere or here?"[323] Lipari places emphasis on a solution that is not within the play, but instead in the future, calling upon the line from the Langston Hughes poem "A dream deferred:" "The only journey we can make is to travel through time to the fulfillment of a promise, to a place that exists not in space, but in future time."[324] In the future, there is hope that the Younger family will move to a different neighborhood; but during the play itself, the play about home and exile "remains in exile."[325] The play's resolution occurs after the play has ended.

In her book *Yearning*, bell hooks describes how *Raisin* is counter-hegemonic: "The play 'interrogated' the fear within black people that being out of our place—not conforming to social norms, especially those set by white supremacy, would lead to destruction, even death."[326] It is thus revolutionary that the Younger family refused their assumed role in society; it is revolutionary that they wanted more. Popoola's play is also counter-hegemonic; the story imagines a family whole and a Germany that recognizes its wrongs and seeks to change unjust laws. Popoola demands an identity for Afro-Germans in Germany and beyond.

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[322] Lisbeth Lipari, "Hansberry's Hidden Transcript," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 1 (2013): 120.

[323] Ibid., 119.

[324] Ibid., 120.

[325] Ibid., 139.

[326] bell hooks, "Liberation Scenes," in *Yearning*, 1.

In *Also by Mail*, the siblings are out of place. Uncle Bola says, "I have tried to make them understand what is right and what is not in a situation like this. They are not from here."[327] Mr. Ogunleye tells Funke, "When I lived in your country" and Funke responds: "It is not my country!"[328] The siblings' Nigerian family considers the siblings German and unaware of Nigerian traditions. Considering this, the siblings search for a type of belonging that will validate all of their cultural heritages. In the play, a certain identity is forced upon Funke. She refuses to accept Germany as her country and her only home. Connecting this idea back to the theory, Fatima El-Tayeb defines a collective memory (and therefore identity) in and beyond the nation. Funke draws her own collective memory and identity within the German nation, but also beyond it.

3. Microaggressions and Empowerment

Germany as home for Afro-Germans is problematized through a scene of microaggression in the play. The play draws into question white societal norms; in the introduction to the play, two activists explain: "Institutional racism is part of being Black in Germany and racial profiling exemplifies one of these untold, silenced German stories."[329] In Germany, Wale is not considered German and is harassed. He experiences border anxiety in Germany, where *Heimat* (home) is based partially, if not fully, on skin color. Wale's story is an illustration of microaggressions against Afro-Germans in German society. In the play, Wale's experience on the train is modeled after a real event in 2010. A young Black German was harassed on the train about his passport, and he

[327] Popoola, 35.

[328] Ibid., 63.

[329] Jamie Schearer and Hadija Haruna, "Introduction," in *Also by Mail*, 11.

compared his treatment to the SS and filed a complaint. The court in Koblenz initially ruled in favor of the police and later realized the mistake and recalled the first ruling.[330] Wale takes a German microaggression of being singled out on the train to escalate it into aggression. In doing so, Wale refuses to allow this instance to be ignored or dismissed as a common Afro-German experience. The play's happy ending to Wale's story presents a better Germany in which racism is recognized and corrected, and he can also be at home. The play documents and brings attention to a legislative shift. This is no longer just merely desired and imagined, but something real and in effect, as shown by the court's decision in Koblenz.[331] The administrative court of Koblenz ruled that identity inspections are not legal. The implications of this decision are a huge step against racial profiling in Germany.[332] The ambition of the play is not then to imagine fictional change, but rather to note that change that is actually happening, to bring attention to it and make this kind of change the norm. This change is a legal change, not a change in people's attitudes.

4. Ancestral Spirits

In *Also by Mail*, Popoola additionally incorporates the diasporic trope of ancestral spirits. Stories that incorporate ancestral spirits are transgressive because they challenge

[330] Ibid., 12-13.

[331] Christian Rath, "Gericht verbietet Polizei-Rassismus," *TAZ*, October 30, 2012, http://www.taz.de/!104549/.

[332] While this is important, the ISD is looking for more accountability and transparency. They have a campaign and petition on their website. For more information, see the ISD website: http://www.stoppt-racial-profiling.de/.

dominant narratives of normalcy.[333] Ghosts, or ancestral spirits challenge what is accepted or not accepted in literature. According to Kathleen Brogan, ghosts act as a go-between for the living. In her book *Cultural Haunting*, she explains, "Through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised."[334] Brogan expresses an understanding of the significance of ghosts in African diasporic literature, without reducing them to a magical realist element. She explains that ghosts can offer agency to a group of people who have been marginalized; indeed, ghosts are necessary to combat the imminent erasure and oppression that marginalized groups experience. Ghosts have agency to revise history. Brogan further argues that they navigate temporality and cultures, which is significant for my analysis in *Also by Mail*. Brogan writes,

> The turn to the supernatural in the process of recovering history emphasizes the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well as the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is essentially an imaginative act . . . Stories of cultural haunting share the plot device and master metaphor of the ghost as go-between, an enigmatic transitional figure moving between past and present, death and life, one culture and another.[335]

Crossing time and space, ghosts are thus able to reconcile things that the "living" characters cannot. Sometimes these ghosts work to retrieve a "lost" past.[336] In her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Toni Morrison explains that these

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[333] Kathleen Brogan, "Haunted Tales of Heirs and Ethnographers," in *Cultural Hunting* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998) 17, also quoted in Anderson, 319.

[334] Brogan, 5-6.

[335] Ibid., 6.

[336] Ibid., 18.

relationships are "benevolent, instructive, and protective and they provide a certain kind of wisdom."[337] Ancestral spirits are meant to take care of future generations. In *Also by Mail*, this is visible in Mr. Ogunleye's role in reconciling the siblings and combating racism in Germany from the afterlife. For Popoola, the dead have agency and still work on behalf of their loved ones from behind the veil.

Mr. Ogunleye serves as an example of a spirit's agency. In her dream, Funke's father explains his physical absence in their lives. Because she is ill with malaria, he is able to come to her as a spirit and share the things he did not share when he was alive. However, their conversation takes a rough start, as Mr. Ogunleye has to tell her to listen to him three times.[338] Funke is very outspoken; Mr. Ogunleye has to ask, "Since when do you talk to your father like this?" and say, "You have taken on a rude tone I am not quite accustomed to, Funke."[339] Mr. Ogunleye is annoyed by a daughter he does not know as an adult; Funke is no longer the little girl he remembers. Gender plays a role for the siblings. Wale is too mournful and shy for his Nigerian family, while Funke is too opinionated and outspoken. Wale does not want to take the role of the eldest son, but the Nigerian family refuses to allow Funke to take over because she is a woman. Gender in the diaspora functions differently in different places.

After a page-and-a-half of dialogue Mr. Ogunleye is finally able to tell Funke his story. For the first time, he admits the racism he experienced in Germany to his daughter.

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[337] Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *What Moves at the Margin*, ed. Toni Morrison and Carolyn C. Denard (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 343, qtd. also in Anderson, 319.

[338] Popoola, 60.

[339] Ibid., 62.

> Mr. Ogunleye: All my grades were first or second-class, never below. I had studied hard, I had fulfilled all the requirements. It had nothing to do with my work not being good . . . [My boss] didn't hide it, his contempt, he showed it openly. I told your mother it was too cold for me, I could no longer deal with the climate.[340]

He told her mother a lie, and she saw the letter the company gave him. He takes the company to court for wrongful termination and wins, but for him, it is still not worth going back to Germany.[341]

> Mr. Ogunleye: I could have [returned] but I had enough. I thought--let me start my business here [in Nigeria], let the Germans be crazy by themselves. They don't want me, fine. I wanted nothing more to do with the country.
>
> Funke: (Pause) Yet you sent us back?
>
> Mr. Ogunleye: When parents divorce it is usual for the children to stay with their mother. I wasn't going to destroy her life. Or yours. I was always working, she was the one . . . you know I was not always that good in, how do you call it? Engaging . . . ?
>
> Funke: Yes, I get it. But you should have told us. Some time. Once at least. You always made it sound that your time was all fun and parties. Nothing offensive ever happened. Racism didn't exist, or maybe it did exist on some odd planet or other but you never experienced it. You made it sound like you took advantage of people instead . . .[342]

This story offers a fuller picture of Mr. Ogunleye and his experiences in Germany. It suggests vulnerability and opposes what he had always told Funke and her brother in the

[340] Ibid., 63.

[341] Ibid., 65.

[342] Ibid.

past. Her father tells her this story so that she can reconcile with her brother. Taking a protective role as ancestral spirit, he rewrites the family history and the family's future as well. He comes to her to bring harmony between Funke and Wale: "It is not good for a sister and a brother to keep fighting. Especially not under these circumstances, when you should be there for each other."[343] Interestingly enough, the discord between Wale and Funke motivates their father to share his experiences to mend their relationship, but not necessarily to mend their fragile relationships with him.

F. Conclusion

In *Also by Mail*, Popoola draws on diaspora arts to make the Afro-German experience transparent. Popoola goes to the diaspora to lean on Lorraine Hansberry as a literary mother. She echoes Lorraine Hansberry's sentiments by using a passage from *A Raisin in the Sun* that reprimands a family who bickers about money. Popoola does not rewrite Hansberry's play but uses an intertextual example of Hansberry's many-layered story of complexity and home to discuss the experiences of Afro-German siblings. Popoola illustrates what it is like to come "home" in the diaspora—the rupture, the break and the disconnect. Diaspora is present through intertextuality, the use of not only *A Raisin in the Sun*, but also the song "Mo' Money Mo' Problems" and the trope of ancestral spirits. The play has a clear resolution and agenda in the performance and reading of the play. Popoola is attempting to show audiences how justice is supposed to function; if you are wronged, you receive justice. Instead of watching a performance of Black trauma, Popoola's play performs fulfillment. Like Hansberry's play, Popoola offers a resolution in the future. Unlike Hansberry, Popoola's play is less ambiguous.

[343] Ibid., 62.

With a transparent writing, Popoola links the literary and musical diaspora of the United States to Nigerian roots, connecting them to Germany through using a variety of English accents, Popoola empowers the narrative of Afro-German siblings through a happy ending.

CHAPTER V

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien (2015)

A. Introduction

Olivia Wenzel is an Afro-German playwright from the former East Germany. Her 2015 play, *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* [Corn in Germany and Other Galaxies] focuses on the protagonist's (Noah's) life with his family in East Germany. Wenzel wrote the play during the postmigrant literature workshop "RAUS--neue deutsche Stücke."[344] *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* is currently being performed at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse. Wenzel's *Mais* was produced in collaboration with director Atif Hussein and designer Petra Korink. Wenzel and Hussein worked collaboratively on the premiere of the production with actors Dela Dabulamanzi, Toks Körner, Asad Schwarz-Msesilamba, Isabella Redfern, Lisa Scheibner, Theo Plakoudakis, and Atilla Oener.

I saw *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* in Berlin in February 2015, together with a large, mostly white audience. The play is an Afro East German story, thus presenting a rare perspective on the German stage. In the play, the protagonist describes growing up in East Germany in the context of a white German family and white German friends. He is unable to connect to people around him. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how *Mais in Deutschland* configures "non-place" as a space of transformative potential for the protagonist Noah; I argue that Noah finds peace and hope in these non-spaces by rejecting society (and its norms) and reconciling with his mother there.

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[344] Katrin Bettina Müller, "Die Reise zum Mond," *TAZ*, February 23, 2015, http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/digitaz/artikel/?ressort=ku&dig=2015%2F02%2F23%2Fa0115&cHash=0bb0f8ad1a92d3b701413d11215c8382

B. Summary

The protagonist of *Mais in Deutschland* is Noah, an Afro-German man who grew up in the GDR. Three Black actors perform the main role of Noah: a man, a woman, and a man who depicts Noah in his comic book. They all wear a similar schoolboy uniform: shorts, knee socks, a collared shirt and cardigan. Noah's white German mother and white German grandfather are also prominent figures in the play. Breaking the fourth wall, Noah tells the audience the story of his life, starting with his mother's involuntary placement in a psychiatric hospital. The next scene fast-forwards to Noah's first visit to his grandparents' house with his mother, Susanne, and father, George. After that, the audience discovers that Noah's father had to go back to Angola and his mother, Susanne, was not allowed to follow him there due to her Stasi file. She was depicted as asocial and did not fall in line with how the Stasi expected East German citizens to behave. Susanne thus raises Noah as a single parent in East Germany, but she does not perform a normative mother role. Susanne is uncommunicative, distant, and self-interested and rejects the performance of motherhood as part of her rejection of being a good East German citizen. Noah is thus not socialized within a family unit and fails to connect with his mother or his school friends during childhood. He is an unsympathetic figure as the play continues.

Interrupting Noah's narrative towards the middle of the play, an actress performs the feature song from the DEFA movie *Solo Sunny* (1980). The play itself does not provide context for the song or performance, but instead continues with Noah's narrative. Meanwhile, Noah gets a job, marries and has kids. Then he has an affair with the waitress at the restaurant where he works (played by the same actress who acts the role of Noah).

The affair is unsuccessful and also an unfulfilling sexual experience. Overall, the play shows how Noah lives a largely unhappy life. He cannot connect with his mother and fails to connect long term with anyone else, including his friends, his wife, and even the woman he has an affair with. Looking for something he is unable to find on land, he decides to take to the sea. He leaves his wife, friend, and son without saying goodbye; they don't know when or if he will return. However, they mention that the comic book he created in his youth will be printed and produced; although they do not have him, they have a piece of his story. The play ends with the plot of the comic book in which a mother and son travel to outer space. The actors use a black and silver rolling tent structure as a space ship and glow-in-the-dark orbs roll around the stage floor. A trickster figure helps them on their journey, bringing them together to enjoy the beauty of the universe.

C. Non-place

What is a non-place? French anthropologist Marc Augé describes non-places in his monograph of the same name. In his book, Augé describes modernity as slippage of time between the past and present[345] and claims that we currently live in a time of supermodernity, which results in non-places.[346] While the discussion of modernity and supermodernity warrants attention, I am more interested in his statements about non-places that are relevant to the discussion of Noah and Susanne's voyage into outer space. Augé defines a non-place as: "space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical,

[345] Marc Augé, *Non-Spaces* (New York: Verso, 1995), 75.

[346] Ibid., 78.

or concerned with identity . . ."[347] Non-space as term does have a negative connotation; with the prefix "non," Augé describes it as "an absence of the place from itself."[348] Expanding on Augé's theories, David Morely illustrates, "'Place,' then, marks the materialized idea of the relations that its inhabitants have with each other, with their ancestors and with outsiders of various sorts."[349] In line with this definition, outer space is a non-space because it is a "hard-to-name place."[350] I believe that the term "place" implies a social or relational dimension—as opposed to "space." East Germany, on the other hand, would be considered a place, because it does focus on identity. By contrast, Augé contends that identity in non-places is not relevant—for him identity is only significant at border crossings.[351]

Noah's comic book takes him and his mother to outer space, raising the question of place and space in Wenzel's play. One reviewer notes Noah's *Fremdheitsgefühl* [feeling of foreigness] in his relationship with his mother.[352] I would like to take this a step further to think about feelings of foreignness as different places are evoked in the play. The latter half of the play pushes audiences towards discussions of confinement and protection, in particular in the context of East Germany. The nation is oftentimes constructed as a safe space. David Morely explains, "[C]ommunal intimacy is reconciled

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[347] "Nonspaces are the spaces of supermodernity." Augé, 77-78, 111.

[348] Ibid., 85.

[349] David Morely, "Postmodern, Virtual and Cybernetic Geographies," in *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 174.

[350] Ibid., 80.

[351] Ibid., 103.

[352] Müller, "Die Reise zum Mond."

with ideas of national greatness as the nation is idealised as a kind of hometown writ large, a socio-geographical environment into whose comforting security we may sink."[353] The play takes place in East Germany, united Germany, and outer space—though the distribution of scenes makes it very hard to pinpoint a chronological sequence. Yet, Noah searches beyond boundaries for peace, a space that is unprotected. People associate the ocean as something with hidden treasure or an unknown territory with frightening marine life. My focus in this section will be the nation as a place and the ocean and outer space as non-places. Because of Noah's inability to build meaningful relationships within the nation, Noah only has hope for what can happen at sea or in outer space. I argue, using Marc Augé's theory, "non-places" are spaces of productivity and freedom for Noah, while East Germany, as a defined and landlocked place, is restrictive and confining.

1. East Germany

Noah begins the play by sharing his story of growing up in East Germany. Specific places within East Germany are evoked, including a restaurant, home, the walk to and from school, and the badminton court. There are multiple other ways in which East Germany is evoked, as well: through references to the movie *Solo Sunny* (1980), the inclusion of Susanne's Stasi files, which are read aloud during the play, and the fact that George could not stay in the GDR, while Susanne could not leave. The play disrupts the notion of race as a non-issue in East Germany, evoking Blackness in multiple ways.

On a small scale, Blackness is evoked though the inclusion of the international 1993 Jamaican hit "Sweat" by Inner Circle. This reggae song can be heard as Noah plays badminton with one of his friends; as a nod to Black identity, it is clearly Jamaican and

[353] Morely, "Heimat, Modernity and Exile," in *Home Territories*, 33.

includes steel drum beats. On a larger scale, however, race hangs in the background in the form of three of Noah's childhood experiences. According to official ideology, race was not important in the GDR;[354] instead, it was asserted that the socialist state extended equality and solidarity to people of all races, as they were all equally oppressed by capitalism. In her chapter "Making African Diaspora Pasts Possible: A Retrospective View of the GDR and Its Black (Step) Children," Peggy Piesche refers to Jeanette Sumalgy's research on Black East German youth and explains, "According to [Sumalgy's] study, [the] adolescents in question did not receive positive support from their social environment during crucial periods of their personal development and identity formation."[355]

In the play, the audience clearly sees that race is part of Noah's life. Noah loses a white friend ("we aren't allowed to play anymore"), partially because of his mother. Her neighbors and Noah's school friends interpreted her behavior as strange and perhaps harmful for their own children. Noah lost a friend because of his own skin color. Additionally, a childhood friend calls him *Schoko-hase* (chocolate bunny). While this may seem like a term of endearment, it is not. Likening someone to a brown inanimate object intended for consumption exposes how his friend may have viewed Noah—there for his own enjoyment and satisfaction, just like a candy bar. Noah immediately comments, "Oh, komm," followed by a lengthy pause. Noah protests gently, but without

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[354] See Quinn Slobodian's *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

[355] Peggy Piesche, "Making African Diaspora Pasts Possible: A Retrospective View of the GDR and Its Black (Step) Children)," in *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Sara Lennox (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 4-5.

really telling his friend that the nickname is inappropriate and why, never addressing it. The nickname evokes a clear distinction between him and his friend, a racial difference resulting in tension, expressed through the silent pause. Playing with this theme of silence and race, Noah runs from neo-Nazis one day after school without telling anyone about it, including his friends: "Es sind fünf. Sie warten vor der Schule auf mich, ich bin 16 und ich muss los. Fünf Glatzen. Es sind zu viele."[356] The skinheads seize him and beat him up. The silent trauma of racism continues; when his mother asks Noah what happened to his bruised face, he answers that he fell from his bike. Because of official denials of racism, the exact time frame of this attack is unclear. The Stasi files mention Susanne and baby Noah in 1977. Given this time frame, the audience can surmise that the attack occurred around the time other racist violence took place in unified Germany. There is no one for Black East German children to talk to about the racialized violence they experience,[357] but Noah's silence also perpetuates the continuation of the myth of the irrelevance of race.

While these elements of race are somber and serious, one comedic element having to do with race emerges at the beginning of the play. When Susanne's father, Mr. Süßmann, first meets George,[358] Mr. Süßmann continually refers to George's home country as Africa instead of Angola. Susanne constantly corrects him: "An-go-la!" Mishearing Susanne, her father says, "Afrikola [a cola beverage], I can drink that all

[356] Wenzel, *Mais*, Feb 2015. Performance.

[357] Piesche, 12.

[358] George is performed by the main Noah, which shows slippage between the identity of father and son.

day," which causes the audience to laugh.[359] Thereafter, Susanne's father asks George whether or not lions, giraffes and other animals exist in "Africa." Susanne frowns, but George smiles and nods, yes, fulfilling Susanne's father's expectations. George's response is an example of one response to racism. Instead of correcting Susanne's father, George plays along with an imagined "Africa" that Susanne's father has. George's true home, Angola, is silenced for the sake of getting along with the in-laws.

In the play, the trickster figure, Lila (performed by the same actress who plays Noah's wife), sings the title song from the DEFA hit *Solo Sunny* (1980). Lila bursts through a door into the middle of the play wearing the exact same costume as Sunny in the film. Her song disrupts Noah's narrative and seems to come from nowhere. The reference to the movie was clear to reviewers of the play.[360] Directed by Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase, the film features a strong, independent female protagonist who sings and travels and is set on who she is as a person. Besides this performance, there are parallels between Sunny and Susanne. The characters are independent and have a rough-around-the-edges personality. Sebastian Heiduschke explains Sunny's autonomy: "Instead [of relationships], Sunny prefers to stay in charge of her own life, something she reaffirms in the film's final sequence as she describes herself: 'I'm blunt, I sleep with whomever I want, I call a jerk a jerk, I am the one the Tornadoes kicked out. I am

[359] In another scene, her parents see Noah as a baby and tell her: "Das Schwarz ist nicht so schlimm. Das kriegen wir doch hin." [The Black is not so bad. We will find a way (to get past it)]. Susanne is so repulsed by her parent's reaction to him and this Afrikola misstep that she refuses any and all contact with them for the rest of her life.

[360] Hao Nguyen, "Surreales Theater: Mais in Deutschlan und anderen Galaxien," *LoNam*, February 24, 2015, http://www.lonam.de/surreales-theater-mais-in-deutschland-und-anderen-galaxien/.

Sunny."[361] Sunny's indifferent attitude permeates the film, and she does not care what other people think of her. Film scholar Stephen Brockmann notes,

> *Solo Sunny's* emphasis on loneliness and death addresses the profound alienation of contemporary urban society, which is characterized by large numbers of single-person households, a high suicide rate, and the all-too-frequent lonely deaths of old people, whose bodies lie for days or weeks in the apartment before being discovered by neighbors.[362]

Susanne's character is similar to Sunny's in multiple ways. She also remains the same person from the beginning to the end of the play. Susanne embodies a rock star, like Sunny; Susanne dyed her hair bright colors and all black in her youth (which is only alluded to in the play, but never seen). In the play, she wears all black clothing and black eye make-up. Susanne also listens to punk music, like the Wende song "Wenn das Herz schimmelt."[363] A reviewer from *Kultura Extra* explains, "Noahs Mutter befindet sich als Punk in ständiger Opposition zu den gesellschaftlichen Normen der herrschenden" [Noah's mother finds herself as a punk in constant opposition to social norms of those in power].[364] A woman in the1970s in the GDR, Susanne prioritizes her feelings and herself

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[361] Sebastian Heiduschke, "The Women's Film, Konrad Wolf and DEFA after the 'Biermann Affair': *Solo Sunny* (Konrad Wolf, 1980)," in *East German Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 115-16.

[362] Stephen Brockmann, "*Solo Sunny* (1980) or Even Socialism Can't Stave Off Loneliness," in *A Critical History of German Film* (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), 278.

[363] Christian Rakow, "Wenn das Herz schimmelt," *Nachtkritik*, February 19, 2015, http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10588&catid=309&Itemid =100476.

[364] Stefan Bock, "Generationenkonflikte, verschiedene Lebensträumen," *Kultura Extra*, February 21, 2015, http://www.kultura-extra.de/theater/spezial/urauffuehrung_oliviawenzel _mais.php.

above anyone else; she has a strong sense of self and is not concerned about others. Feeling trapped, Susanne also shares a similar melancholic personality like Sunny's.

With the allusion to *Solo Sunny*, *Mais* references the tragic aspect of daily life in the GDR (mental illness in particular), ruining the cheery, positive image the East German government was desperate to promote. Sebastian Heiduschke further explains, "Like no other film of these years, *Solo Sunny* represents the multiple layers of life in East Germany in the late 1970s."[365] The film disrupts misconceptions of East Germany and portrays a real picture of the unhappy life that many led in East Germany. German studies scholar Johannes Moltke explains, "She [Sunny] tries to square the circle between the glamor of the stage, of being someone else *and* being herself—but she fails at both, caught in between the realms of performance and identity."[366] Performance and identity are important in the play, and, as these scholars argue, a way for Sunny to be validated by others and an escape from monotonous and unhappy daily life.

There are even more parallels between Noah and the film character Sunny. Breaking into the middle of *Mais*, Lila (who sings Sunny) acts as a bridge figure between the characters of Noah and Susanne, demonstrating their similarities. Even though the character of Noah is played by three different actors at different points in the play, like Susanne and Sunny he demonstrates no large shift in personality, in that he maintains his

[365] Heiduschke, "The Women's Film," 115.

[366] Johannes Moltke, "Performing the GDR: The Last DEFA Generation and the Tradition of Theatricality," in *DEFA After East Germany* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), 144.

inability to make close connections with people throughout. He remains largely the same person at the end as he was at the beginning of the performance.[367]

After her death, Susanne leaves Noah her Stasi file, diary, and drawings.[368] This package and gesture make Noah aware of her past pain. A note to Noah that Susanne included in the package reads that she is happy they went their different ways, because, as Susanne writes, "wir im Grunde nicht zueinander passen" [we aren't suited/ we are a bad match].[369] Besides this, there is nothing in her diary about Noah. The erasure of her son shows how deeply Susanne refused to perform motherhood and pushed for independence and her own identity. She concludes the letter by saying that nothing can hurt her anymore: not Noah, not her parents, not the government. Outside of the constraints of East Germany, and later unified Germany, Susanne finds freedom in the unreachable space of the afterlife. This collection of documents reveals to the audience that Noah's mother was never allowed to leave East Germany. Initially, Susanne was planning on leaving to be with Noah's father in Angola, but she was not granted an exit visa, which traumatizes Susanne. Susanne explains:

> damals, die ddr, ich saß fest. Gab keinen weg raus. Alles, was ich wollte, war weg sein. Aber mich umbringen, das hat nicht funktioniert . . . aber dann kam George. Und mit ihm meine idee . . . dass George nach zwei jahren aufenthalt zurück musste, das war klar. Aber wenn ich ein kind von ihm habe, dann müssen sie mir den antrag genehmigen, dachte ich. Dann komm ich raus aus der ganzen scheiße, kann das kind nach angola bringen und dort lassen, kann endlich frei sein.[back then in the GDR, I served time. There wasn't a way out. Everything that I wanted was far away. But

[367] Brockmann, 281.

[368] Noah wants to wear a dress to Susanne's funeral. His wife, Anni, repeated tries to tell him to take off the dress. In order for him to grieve, he has to queer his male identity.

[369] Olivia Wenzel, *Mais in Deutschland,* Ballhaus Naunynstraße, February 2015.

> kill myself . . . that didn't work. But then came George. And with him my idea . . . it was clear that George had to return after two years. But if we had a kid together, then the government had to give me a release, I thought. Then I can get out of the shitty situation and can bring the child to Angola and leave it there, and I can be free].[370]

In the first sentence, Susanne uses slang for serving time in jail. Semantically, she equates her life in East Germany to serving a prison sentence. Her friend informed on her to the Stasi, blocking her way out of East Germany. In this sense, East Germany was a cell for Noah's mother. The audience must understand the mother as a product of her time and place. For her, George and Noah would have been a way out of the guarded borders of East Germany.

Noah's father, George, could not extend his stay, nor could he return to East Germany once he returned to Angola. In the play, there is little the audience knows about George or what he experienced as a Black man in East Germany, but it is probable that he was a worker and not a student. Piesche explains: "A two-class system developed [in the GDR] in which the country of origin often clearly indicated whether a particular foreigner was studying or working. People from Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, and Iraq mostly came to study. In contrast, people from Angola, Mozambique, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Vietnam and Cuba . . . took up . . . an apprenticeship as a worker."[371] Piesche continues, "Depending on the treaty, foreigners were allowed to stay for three to six years, and rotation was strictly enforced."[372] This leads to the discussion of the history of Angolan workers and racial anxiety in East Germany.

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[370] Ibid.

[371] Piesche, 7.

[372] Ibid., 8.

Noah's father George predates the official presence of Angolans in East Germany, but their history is still important for understanding the play. Angolans were only "invited" to East Germany to work in the late 1980s, making the temporal window of their presence very narrow.[373] However, this relationship was not all mutually beneficial as a work and skill exchange; racial dynamics were still at play. During the duration of their stay, the "GDR offer[ed] a paternalistic attitude toward non-white guest-workers from Angola or Vietnam."[374] Yet, the East German government claimed that their relationship with their foreign workers was better than that of the capitalist West.[375] However, the relationships between the communist countries were not better or equal, as I will illustrate below.

By the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, large groups from communist allied countries were working in the GDR. According to Gregory Witkowski, "By 1989, approximately 100,000 non-Soviet contract workers were living in the GDR: Angolans, Mozambicans, Cubans, North Vietnamese, and Chinese . . . By 1992, however, four-fifths of these workers had left Germany because of severe unemployment, discrimination in the workplace, and xenophobic violence."[376] Although it was clear that many East Germans, especially East German youth, were experiencing high

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[373] Bernd Schaffer, "Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East German Approach, 1976-1989," in *Comrades of Color*, 105.

[374] Evan Torner and Victoria Rizo Lenshyn, "Imposed Dialogues: Jorg Foth and Tran Vu's GDR-Vietnamese Co-production *Dschungelzeit*," in *Comrades of Color*, 243.

[375] Deniz Göktürk, Anton Kaes and David Gramling, "Our Socialist Friends," in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 67.

[376] Gregory Witkowski, "Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany," in *Comrades of Color*, 69.

unemployment and social stress during and after German unification, the outbreak of violence in the "new" German states ruptured the myth that racism had not existed in the GDR. In the introduction to *Germany in Transit*, the editors explain, "In the early 1990s, resentment toward foreigners led to physical assaults and arson attacks on asylum residences in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Hoyerswerda, Frankfurt/Oder, and Magdeburg in the former German Democratic Republic."[377] With the dismantling of the East German structure of policing and surveillance, racialized violence against foreigners continued in the former GDR, including the November 24, 1990, murder of Angolan Amadeo Antonio in Eberswalde.[378] This specific instance of racialized violence in the former East German states is just one example. The segregation of the minority contract workers in special housing made it possible for racists to carry out multiple horrendous arson attacks. Living in separate isolated areas,[379] the foreign workers screamed for help but were burned alive in multiple house arsons in foreign worker apartment complexes in the former GDR. Also during this time, many foreign workers were forced to leave; these situations illustrate that there was no equality amongst East German workers and contract workers. Some sources cite the deportation of sixty percent of East Germany's foreign workers, including Angolans.[380] This points to anxiety around race and foreign identity in the GDR during and after the tumultuous time of the *Wende*.

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[377] Göktürk, Kaes, and Gramling, "Introduction," in *Germany in Transit*, 13.

[378] Göktürk, Kaes, and Gramling, "Chronology," in *Germany in Transit*, 504.

[379] Göktürk, Kaes, and Gramling, "Our Socialist Friends," in *Germany in Transit*, 68.

[380] Göktürk, Kaes, and Gramling, "Chronology," 503.

D. Motherhood

Susanne's treatment of Noah is a reflection of her rejection of performing motherhood. There are plenty of examples in the play of Susanne's refusal to be a mother. Susanne is neither selfless nor giving to Noah and eventually kicks him out of the house. Instead of calling her "mother," he calls her by her first name, Susanne; instead of describing Susanne as caring, Noah describes her as *gereizt*, or irritated. One reviewer writes that Susanne never managed to love Noah.[381] Although Noah does receive unconditional love from his grandfather, it doesn't replace the love that he wanted from his mother.

The play showcases the result of Noah's strained relationship with others through the trifurcation of the character. Because Noah does not have a healthy ego, he is split into three people: the main Noah for approximately seventy percent of the play (performed by actor Toks Körner), the female Noah (performed by actor Dela Dabulamanzi), and the comic book Noah (performed by Asad Schwarz-Msesilamba). While all three incarnations of Noah are distinct, they work to illustrate Noah's detachment from other people. For example, when (the main) Noah brings his new fiancée to meet his grandparents, he leaves the room to go to the bathroom. The female Noah takes over the role in the bathroom, compartmentalizing his experiences and relationships. The female Noah acts out a masturbation scene in which Noah imagines "screwing" the girl from the video store from behind, stating he (she) can't get hard with his pregnant wife—a very normative male viewpoint. Through a moment of self with self, the playwright represents Noah's fragmented self and inability for unification. He

[381] Müller, "Die Reise zum Mond."

splits himself into various characters as a result of an unhealthy ego. Noah cannot connect with anything or anyone, including himself. This non-connection results in isolation.

In the play, Noah's unsympathetic personality seems to stem from his mother, Susanne. As his mother, and an all-around unsympathetic character in the play, Susanne is an actor in the scheme to take the blame for Noah's behavior. She is a loner, thinks only of herself, and does not consider others in her life. For example, she is annoyed with him and asks him to stop being himself: "kannst du jetzt bitte aufhören, so zu sein." Noah then asks how he is, to which Susanne responds, "na, wie du eben." Just the way he was irritated Susanne. Not only did Susanne have an emotional repulsion to Noah, but also a physical repulsion. She was never physically available for Noah. She pushes him away and never hugs or kisses him, stating, "ja, ich hab ihn nie gern angefasst, das war nun mal so" [I never liked to hug him, that was just the way it was]. Eventually, she asks him to move out when he is fourteen, telling him, "ich glaube, es wäre besser, wenn du ausziehst." Noah asks why and Susanne responds, "Wie wir hier leben, Noah, das ist – wir verstehen uns einfach nicht" [The ways we live here, Noah, it is—we don't get along]. Towards the end of the play, a character asks Susanne, "Magst du Noah?" [Do you like Noah] to which Susanne responds, "klar" [of course]. Then, when the character asks if Susanne loves Noah, Susanne is silent.[382] Her silence reveals that her 'liking' Noah does not extend to the depth of motherly love. She goes on to say that she has an

[382] This character is the trickster figure Lila, whom I discuss towards the end of the chapter.

apartment picked out for him behind the train station.[383] Known as a place of excess alcohol and drugs, these apartments are typically in a bad neighborhood and dangerous. Yet, Susanne tells her teenaged son to move there. The fact that she had an apartment planned out for him shows that she did the research to find something and that she thought about this more than once. In doing so, she demonstrates that their relationship could not be resolved from her side. Subsequently, Noah and his mother go for a while without seeing each other.[384] His failure to connect to his mother results in a life-long impact on his other relationships.

This absence of the mother leads to a feeling of childhood anxiety for Noah. Throughout the play, Noah tries to connect with his mother, to gain her love, but he fails. In my analysis, this failure to connect to his mother leads to mourning and Noah's inability to mature. In her article "Die Reise zum Mond," reviewer Katrin Müller notices Noah is unable to mature past his childhood the entire play.[385] Noah's inability to escape childhood is shown through his wardrobe: juvenile shorts, knee-high socks, and a cardigan. While Noah desires to be with Susanne and clings to her emotionally, Susanne rejects this and embraces independence. Even when Susanne does allow Noah into her past, through sharing her Stasi files, personal letters, and old journals, she mails the files

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[383] Susanne tells Noah: "wir verstehen uns nicht nur nicht gut, noah, wir verstehen uns gar nicht. Ich habe wirklich alles versucht, aber du lässt mir keine wahl. In der strasse hinterm alten bahnhof, da ist eine dachgeschosswohnung frei" [We don't get along well, Noah, we don't get along at all. I tried everything, but you leave me no choice. On the street behind the train station, there's an attic apartment free].

[384] Wenzel, *Mais in Deutschland*, February 21, 2015.

[385] Müller, "Die Reise zum Mond."

to Noah (but asks him not to mail it to his grandparents), thereby allowing her to be vulnerable without being physically present.

1. An Alternative Perspective

What if motherhood is not natural? Psychoanalyst Elsa First describes the way motherhood has been "idealized and devalued by being considered merely natural and so taken for granted."[386] Many subsequent feminist theorists have attempted to reframe Freud's theories. Feminist and psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's book *The Bonds of Love* reframes motherhood, asserting that the mother's identity and subjectivity are also important but rarely acknowledged.[387] Here, I explore the ways in which Susanne retains her own subjectivity outside of motherhood. To do this, I will utilize feminist interventions in psychoanalytic theory that prioritize Susanne's identity as a person without blame.[388]

Susanne's absence in Noah's life is in part due to her protection of her identity outside of motherhood.[389] She often yells at Noah, is moody, and thinks only of her own needs. On the societal expectation that she is supposed to love her child, Susanne says, "ich krieg's nicht abgegeben und ich krieg's nicht geliebt. also so, wie man das eigene

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[386] Elsa First, "Mothering, Hate, and Winnicot," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 147.

[387] Jessica Benjamin, "The First Bond," in *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 23-24.

[388] For more on "bad" motherhood in the U.S. context, see the edited collection *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[389] In his review, Stefan Bock says that Susanne is seventeen when she had Noah, but I had no recollection of this as an audience member.

kind eigentlich lieben müsste" [I can't get it given and I can't get it loved. Well, as if you have to love your own child.] Susanne is cold, unfeeling, and indifferent to Noah. She does not like Noah because he projects his needs onto her, and she refuses to fulfill them. They live together more as roommates than as mother and child. Angrily, Susanne screams: "ich war keine gute mutter. das willst du hören, oder? na und. komm drüber weg! was brauchst du, dass ich mich entschuldige? kam dir jemals der gedanke, dass ich alles getan habe, dass ich alles für dich tue, was ich kann?" [I wasn't a good mother. that's what you want to hear, right? So what. Get over it! What do you want, that I apologize? Did you ever think that I did everything, that I do everything for you that I can?]. Susanne says that she was not a good mother, but that she did the best she could, and refuses to apologize for being a "bad mother."

Alexandra Merley Hill discusses an alternative interpretation of motherhood in her book *Playing House* (2012). She examines mother-daughter relationships in contemporary novels by young, (formerly East) German women who are daughters of the 1968 generation, integrating time and place as relevant to motherhood, a point which has not been discussed in other literature. Particularly, Merley Hill investigates the novels of Julia Franck, which contain distant mothers. She explains: "Common to all of the works by Franck, the mother remains emotionally inaccessible to and distant from her child(ren). Without exception, the protagonists desire greater intimacy with their mothers."[390] Julia Franck's novels destabilize conventional maternal identity.[391] While

[390] Alexandra Merley Hill, *Playing House* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 65.

[391] Ibid., 149.

Merley Hill uses Julia Franck's novels to illustrate this, I believe these ideas are relevant for the relationship between Susanne and Noah in *Mais in Deutschland*.

Engaging with theory on motherhood by Freud, Jessica Benjamin, and Nancy Chodorow, Merley Hill does not blame the mother for the child's upbringing. She seeks to examine fictional mothers as persons beyond the performative identity of motherhood. She argues that the rejection of a conventional performance of motherhood, on the part of this generation of East German mothers, allows room for their own agency and identity outside of this role. Her theories do not shame the mother or hold her responsible for her children's emotional life. Such a perspective also takes the pressure off Susanne for not being receptive and emotionally available to Noah. Like the fictional East German mothers that are characters in Franck's novels, Susanne is "increasingly independent from the norm of the nuclear family."[392]

There are multiple similarities between Susanne and the mothers in Merley Hill's research. Susanne too never wanted to be a mother; she says, "ich habe ihn nicht haben wollen. die liebe, die kam erst später. und dann war sie irgendwie verdreht" [I didn't want to have him. The love came later. And then it was somehow twisted]. This twisted love that Susanne had for Noah is revealed through a later concession; she wanted to be pregnant, but not because she wanted a child. Jessica Benjamin explains a sense of loss of pregnancy some women experience after delivery: "It thus includes the sense of loss that you are no longer inside me, no longer simply my fantasy of you, that we are no longer physical and physically one, and I can no longer take care of you simply by taking care of

[392] Ibid., 65.

myself."[393] The spatial disconnect brings complications; pregnancy without the responsibilities of parenthood is more of a selfish notion. Susanne was excited that the father was excited about the baby but never experienced excitement separate from the father. Her failure to be excited about the baby foreshadowed her position on motherhood for the rest of her life.

Merley Hill applies Judith Butler's theory of drag to motherhood. Like Butler's "reclaiming [drag] as a potentially subversive act,"[394] Merley Hill claims this "drag" performance of motherhood as subversive as well:

> Drag in Butler's sense is an exaggerated performance of gender, one in which the markers of gender are taken to extremes . . . While this performance [of motherhood] is an obvious staging of femininity, it elevates femininity to the point of parody. And in drawing attention to the performative quality of gender, it undermines the "naturalness" of gender.[395]

With her theory on gender and drag, Butler challenges the naturalness of gender, instead showing that gender is a daily performance, where the agency comes from the individual and not the audience. Merley Hill engages this theory to show that motherhood is not something natural or innate, but rather performed, which in turn relieves the pressure of being a certain type of mother: "What Franck's works show is that the identity 'mother' is not natural, biological or inherent. Instead, it is performative and can be 'done' like any other."[396] This performative notion of a motherhood that is "done" helps us reconsider Susanne and ultimately shows her subjectivity. If motherhood is

[393] Benjamin, 15.

[394] Merley Hill, 27.

[395] Ibid., 28.

[396] Ibid., 109.

simply something that a mother performs or "does" and repeats daily, then the execution of that doing is less important. Just as we decide how we want to perform gender, we can decide how we perform motherhood. Merley Hill says that we shouldn't think of mothers as good or bad, but instead as motherhood in continual performance. Her theory of motherhood as performance disrupts the assumption of the naturalness of an ideal motherhood. There are pressures of motherhood and what motherhood looks like, yet there is no manual, only societal expectation. Merley Hill points out: "Mothering is a learned behavior. This is the first clue that the maternal is not an inherent predisposition but rather a conditioned, performative identity."[397] If we think the performance is perfect, it means that the performance fits into our societal conditioned notions of what motherhood is supposed to look like. Merley Hill writes: "Women who have given birth to children aspire or are pressured to meet expectations of motherhood, which is also a copy of a copy, for which there is no original."[398] It is also important to note the mothers in Julia Franck's novels did not want to become mothers, but rather the desire to be pregnant arose from an external pressure, like a partner.[399] While the mother is expected to be the entire world for the child, the father is not expected to do anything for the child's identity formation. This dynamic, that the mother is supposed to be the entire world for the child, puts a pressure on mothers, while fathers are not given parallel pressure.

[397] Ibid., 116.

[398] Ibid., 147.

[399] Ibid., 118.

Essentially Merley Hill shows the limitations of the ideals of motherhood and does not blame mothers for their (seemingly failed) relationship with their children. In further examining the role of motherhood in Franck's work, Merley Hill also notices that the daughters in the novels cannot see their mothers as anything but a mother[400] and therefore are hurt when mothering is not a main priority. It is part of childhood development to realize that one cannot always depend on mothers both physically and psychologically. The mothers can be physically present, while being psychologically absent. The fathers are physically absent, but ever present in the memories of the child and the mother.[401] In the play, Noah asks Susanne why she doesn't visit his father, George. The question hangs, unanswered. Noah's father takes up space in the play through his absence. Noah's father takes time and attention away from Noah by occupying mental space in Susanne's thoughts, because Susanne is resentful that George left her with a child. Her anger and resentment in part stems from their different roles in childrearing. In George and Susanne's relationship, George acted as Noah's primary caregiver until his departure. George is someone who can traverse boundaries, or rather, is forced to traverse boundaries in leaving the GDR for Angola. When he does come up in conversation between Noah and Susanne, she says, "George ist in Angola mit seiner neuen Familie" [George is in Angola with his new family]. There is a hint of jealousy from Susanne; this could have been her life. Indeed, having a child was meant to be her way to get out of East Germany. This attempt is unsuccessful. On the other hand, Noah yearns to connect to his father. In the play, Noah never imagines going to Angola once

[400] Ibid., 109.

[401] Similarly to Franck's novels, here the fathers are absent. Ibid., 150.

Germany unifies. The question is, what prevents Noah and Susanne from going to Angola to visit Noah's father? And why can she not answer Noah's questions? These questions remain unanswered.

2. Reconciling Susanne

In her play, Wenzel thus complicates the role of the mother. Susanne is a character who shows that the line between motherhood and individual identity is hard to negotiate. On one hand, Susanne is culpable as a mother because she never reciprocates Noah's love. Noah tries time and time again to reach out to her, to be with her, but she refuses—to the point that she kicks him out of the house, although the plot does not point to a wrong doing on his part. On the other hand, Susanne evokes empathy; circumstances made it impossible for her to be with the person she loves. Further, she is battling mental illness, as demonstrated by her attempted suicide and forced stay in an asylum. George was Noah's primary caregiver because Susanne rejected the performance of motherhood. After he left the GDR, Susanne wanted her parents to take primary custody of Noah, but the state refused to allow this. Although she tries over and over to reject it, the role of mother is forced on her. Her rejection of motherhood highlights her identity outside of motherhood and instead as a person. The central question of the play is not about blaming Susanne, but instead her reaction to motherhood as a result of the confinement of East Germany.

The temporal situatedness of motherhood for the women in East Germany was fraught with tension.[402] Women were expected to work as part of the socialist state: "The

[402] For a comparison of East German feminism and West German feminism, see Myra Marx Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

new socialist East German economy required full-time employment of all women."[403] The expectation of women in East Germany was to also be a mother.[404] East German women were expected to be both mother and worker, despite the fact that women in the GDR worked forty-four hours each week.[405] Historian Eva Kolinsky explains: "In the GDR, women had not been forced to choose between traditional and non-traditional roles, between family duties and employment, but had been expected to perform both."[406] Women were still expected to do the shopping, child rearing, and carrying out household duties.[407]

Motherhood was an expectation for women in East Germany and not a choice.[408] Creech explains: "The *Gesetz über die Mutter-und Kinderschutz und die Rechte der Frau* [Law for the Protection of Mothers and Children and Women's Rights] in particular privileged women's special needs as citizens who are assumed to be or to become

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[403] Ilona Ostner, "Gender, Family and the Welfare State: Germany Before and After Unification," in *Social Transformation and the Family in Post-Communist Germany*, ed. Eva Kolinsky (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 90.

[404] Women in East Germany had children much younger than West German women. For more, see Ostner, 92.

[405] Eva Kolinsky, "Recasting Biographies: Women and the Family," in *Social Transformation and the Family in Post-Communist Germany*, 122.

[406] Ibid., 123.

[407] Ibid., 122.

[408] "Woman as a site, as the physical, material space of biological reproduction was understood as her primary mode of being in the world." Jennifer Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 95.

mothers . . . "[409] The *Gesetz* was intended to allow women to "juggle their natural and social roles."[410] In East Germany, women were responsible for bearing children; the East German government needed women to reproduce to create workers.[411] The government's ideal of motherhood was situated within a family unit. The ideal East German family had two parents and two children.[412] The government's views on the function of the family in East Germany can be found in the 1966 Family Code, which Hildegard Marie Nickel explains thusly:

> The family was defined in the Code as the smallest cell in society and, because of the intensity of the emotional ties of love, the feelings of security and respect specific to the family, it was deemed to be irreplaceable for the upbringing and socialization of children.[413]

The family's relevance was thus tied to reproduction twofold, but in reality most families in East German were led by single parent households, with women bearing all the weight. Women in East Germany were not only meant to reproduce workers, but were also expected to reproduce socialist ideology in their children's upbringing. Nickel further explains that there were various phases of women's policies during the GDR. Nickel explains: "During the third phase of women's policy (1976-1980), freedom of choice and equal opportunities remained core issues but the family gained a new centrality . . .

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[409] Ibid., 13.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., 94.

[412] Kolinsky, 121.

[413] Hildegard Marie Nickel, "Women and Women's Policies in East and West Germany, 1945-1990," in *Women and Women's Policies in East and West Germany, 1945-1990*, ed. Eva Kolinsky (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 29.

[W]omen's policy now faced the challenge of making family and career compatible without forcing women to choose or alternate between them."[414] Women resisted norms in part. The agency that women exercised in terms of motherhood was to either become or remain single. Eva Kolinsky explains, "Women, it seems, were more dissatisfied with the persistence of traditional role patterns in the their private sphere and vented their dissatisfaction by petitioning for divorce or refraining from marriage."[415]

In *Mais in Deutschland*, Susanne exercises resistance to norms in multiple ways. Susanne resists motherhood by refusing the role and petitioning the state for her parents to take custody of Noah. Further, Susanne chooses to not have another child, rejecting the ideal family unit. Instead, she remains single, like many East German women. Most importantly, Susanne is subversive towards the state by refusing to raise her son with the ideology of the socialist state.

E. Non-Places in the Performance

While East Germany is a defined place within the play, in reality the border of East Germany disappeared. As the momentous occasion of the Fall of the Berlin Wall is not documented in the play, however, the transition between the existence and passing of East Germany is not represented, and pre-and post-Wall events bleed together in the drama. While East Germany continues to live in the imaginations of many, it cannot be seen as a non-place; it existed in the past, even though it no longer exists. Reviews have

[414] Ibid., 29.

[415] Kolinsky, 123.

called this play surreal ("schlanke Fantasie" and "surreal[er] poetisch[er] Realismus").[416] Other reviews refer to Lila as a surreal element, calling her a "rätselhafte Schicksalfigur" and "schräger Paradiesvogel."[417] I do not argue against these readings, but instead claim that this play establishes distinct markers between the fictional comic book and what is meant to be understood as reality.

Therefore, the notion of non-place is more productive for understanding the play. The play ends in other non-places, which makes them more relevant. The play takes place around three time-space clusters: the GDR, unified Germany, and the comic book setting of outer space. Because the play ends with Noah traveling to outer space, this non-space is meaningful for our discussion and understanding of the play.

There are a few theories available for evaluating the significance of outer space in the play, including Afro-Futurism or utopian. I wondered as well if there were elements of Afro-Futurism in the play. This term was developed by Mark Dery to "describe African-American culture's appropriation of technology and science fiction imagery."[418] Elements of Afro-Futurism include: Black Nationalism, spirituality, and an imagined utopian future.[419] In the introduction to *The Black Imagination*, editors Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman offer this definition: "More specifically Afro-Futurism

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[416] See reviews Müller "Die Reise zum Mond"; Patrick Wildermann, "Mutter, ich schieß' dich auf den Mond," *Tagesspiegel*, February 21, 2015, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/ddr-familientheater-mutter-ich-schiess-dich-auf-den-mond/11402680.html; and Hao Nguyen, "Surreales Theater."

[417] Rakow, "Wenn das Herz schimmelt."

[418] Mark Dery, "Black to the Future 1.0," in *Afro-Future Females*, ed. Marleen Barr (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 6.

[419] Ibid., 10.

considers issues of time, technology, culture and race, focusing on Black speculations about the future, foregrounding Black agency and creativity, explored through literature, film, art and music."[420] It seems that the Middle Passage is really important in Afro-Futurism, and all of the examples seem to stem from slavery and pan-Africanism and spirituality. However, I find these elements lacking in *Mais*. The play is not Afrocentric. There is nothing that connects this to Sun Ra, or any other former iterations of Afro-Futurism like George Clinton or the Parliament.[421] Utopias are usually social places—idealized towns, societies. If a utopia is "an ideal place or state,"[422] there is no ideal in this play. Insofar as the play blends fact and fantasy, it could be considered surreal; but it is important to remember that the fantasy scenes are squarely presented as part of the fictional comic book of Noah's imagination. Further, Noah's comic book is not an idealized society, but instead concentrates on one relationship—the one between mother and son. Threads of surrealism through the fantastic exist in the comic book featured in the play, as well as space, the diaspora and interrogating the past in Afro-Futurism. Instead of discussing the style of the play, let's look at the productivity of non-place in *Mais in Deutschland*.

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[420] Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman, "Introduction," in *The Black Imagination*, ed. Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 3.

[421] For an analysis of Afro-Futurism in Parliament, see Soyica Diggs Colbert's, "Black Movements: Flying Africans in Spaceships," in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 129-48.

[422] "Utopia," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed December 8, 2016, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/utopia.

While racial identity has significant impacts in social and political places, as we have seen in Noah's experience with neo-Nazis, national and racial identity are no longer relevant in the specific non-places to which Noah travels. Identity-less outer space frees Noah of his identity both as East German and Afro-German. However, he chooses to retain his identity as son. The non-place-ness of outer space allows him introspection—in Augé's terms, "a simultaneous distancing from the spectator and the spectacle is not also absent . . . "[423] In non-places, one cannot see everything, only glimpses of it,[424] which is the case for Noah and Susanne as they explore the galaxy, and those parts are always in motion.

Non-places are also a crossroads, where people meet;[425] Augé gives the example of spaces such as escalators or highways.[426] Noah and Susanne do not travel on an escalator or highway, but in a spaceship to nowhere in particular. The spaceship acts an as a non-place where people can meet and have a harmonious emotional response to each other. Because this non-place is imagined, it is a non-place of Noah's own making. Susanne's lack of subjectivity gives Noah complete control of his relationship with his mother. This is in stark contrast to Susanne's independence and rejection of all roles during her life.

The ocean is also an example of a non-place in the play. At the beginning of the play, Noah reminisces about his family time at the beach as a place of "peace." The play

[423] Augé, 92.

[424] Ibid., 86.

[425] Ibid., 107.

[426] Ibid.

asks the audience to recall this relationship Noah has to the ocean when he leaves for sea at the end of the play. Shortly before the voyage to outer space, Noah quits his job and goes out to sea.[427] His impetus for going is unclear. Noah asks the woman he has an affair with earlier in the play (Celine) to go with him. It is unclear whether or not she goes. His son (Phil) and friend Freddy (with whom he moved in after Susanne kicked him out of the house) do not know when or if Noah will return.

The ocean represents a space of hope and freedom for Noah in the play. With an unending horizon, the ocean (like outer space) appears boundless. At the beginning of the play, Noah recalls a memory at the beach with his family. While fighting with his mother, Noah says, "Ich denke an unsere tage am see." The use of the present tense "denke" show the cyclic device of this memory for Noah. He continues, "in den tagen am see, da steckt frieden . . . am see hat meine mutter nie an den nägeln gekaut."[428] Nail biting and chewing represent Susanne's unnamed worries and concerns, but Noah uses this to discuss the absence of her nervous habit while on the beach. While arguing with his mother, Noah connects an unhappy memory of a verbal fight with his mother to a more peaceful time and specifically, a peaceful place, where he did not argue with his mother. The ocean, then, provides a non-place for Noah which acts as an antidote to his country of origin, with its borders all around. Perhaps Noah finds comfort here, in the alternative space of ocean. Sailing on the ocean, Noah is simultaneously nowhere and somewhere. Perhaps the ocean offers him peace, or solitude, something he could not gain with his

[427]Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) is another example of a book in which the main character from East Germany goes to sea.

[428] Wenzel, *Mais in Deutschland*, dir. Atif Hussein, Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Berlin. Feb 2015. Performance.

friends and family.

The very last scene of the play takes audiences to another non-place, outer space. In Noah's comic book, he and Suanne explore the galaxy together. Noah and his mother travel in a car to a field where a spaceship is waiting for them. With their car, they run over the trickster figure, Lila, who pokes at the ugly parts of their relationship in order to mend it. Many trickster figures think only about themselves and their own self-preservation,[429] but Lila is interested in reconciling Noah and Susanne. With the help of Lila's dog Pozo, they travel to outer space. There, mother and son stop fighting and enjoy the beauty of the galaxy. In this product of Noah's imagination, Noah has created a space for himself and his mother to co-exist peacefully and to have a moderately good relationship (at the sacrifice of Susanne's subjectivity). Space as a non-place offers them an opportunity to tranquilly coexist. However, they never reconcile completely; even in the comic book, Noah does not envision a perfect relationship with Susanne. They argue in the spaceship, just as they did on earth. Eventually, however, they stop and take in the beauty of the galaxy, just enjoying traveling in a non-place together. Ironically, Noah domesticates the "untamed" space of outer space, creating a peaceful home for himself and Susanne. This impending reconciliation is the beginning of a better relationship with her.

F. Conclusion

While the other plays I have dealt with focused on lived experiences of multiple authors—experiences that are generally relatable for Black people in contemporary

[429] For more information about Anansi tricksters in the diaspora, see Nadine George-Grave, "Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities," in *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 33-44.

Germany—this play explores a mother-son narrative set in a very specific time and place. The play is not just about the mother-son relationship, but the surrounding circumstances that have made their relationship the way it is. The play expresses the issue of fractured identity through using several actors to represent one character and moves beyond the common experience of audience members into imaginary realms. I argue that the play interrogates complicated familial relationships in a nuanced way; it allows for subjectivity and understanding, but also an imagined reconciliation in a created space. East Germany acts as an invisible character in the play: for its treatment of Susanne, for not allowing Noah's father to stay, for making Noah feel like he had to keep those racialized moments of violence to himself. Instead of making sweeping claims about Black East Germans using the character of Noah, I believe it is more productive to discuss his specific failed relationship with his mother as a result of her rejection of East German cultural norms.

A Freudian analysis would call Noah's relationship with his mother into question and blame his inability to form bonds with anyone else on his inability to bond with his mother. However, Alexandra Merley Hill rejects one ideal of motherhood, explaining that East German mothers of the 1968 generation have repeatedly rejected a performance of motherhood. Indeed, Susanne clings to her individual identity and attempts to shed the role over and over again. Like the title character from the DEFA movie *Solo Sunny*, Susanne is fiercely independent and remorseless.

In this chapter, I have shown the impact of motherhood, places and non-places in the play *Mais in Deutschland und anderen Glaxien*. Noah's fractured identity is performed through the use of multiple Black actors on stage. Equally an aesthetic and

political choice, it allows roles for multiple Black performers on stage. Optically, it takes the focus off white performers and instead focuses on Noah's experience. Noah's fractured identity is a result of his failed connection to his mother. Susanne does not meet the expectations and the needs of Noah as a child or adult. This severed relationship causes Noah to seek non-places for a resolution. These spaces are productive and offer opportunity for hope and healing. Noah sails the sea in the play, and in his fictional comic book, he imagines a mended relationship with his mother in outer space. More importantly, the non-place offers a space of reconciliation for them both. Finding no connection to city or country, Noah explores beyond boundaries of land and Earth, providing an example of the ways Afro-German theater continues to push boundaries on German stages by taking the setting of the play outside of Germany. In the final play I discuss in this dissertation, the Afro-German authors have continually pushed the limits of possibility and eventually to arrive in outer space. Noah can find himself whole there.

G. It's Not Over

In the plays, Afro-German identity is negated in multiple spaces: the family, the school, and the larger community. Family was thematized in Chapter 4, "Race Out of Place" as Noah's mother rejects him. The school is implicated in *real life: Deutschland*, as the children perform their experiences of racism asking the teacher not to use the N-word; in a later scene, a child is called the N-word on the playground and asks her parent what it means. Finally, in *Heimat, bittersüße Heimat*, and *Also by Mail*, the plays accuse the larger community performing racism experienced by the Black Germans at the bus stop and on the train.

The Black German theater features different microaggressions in order to remind Black German actors and to demonstrate to audience members what daily life in Germany is like for Black Germans. Because microaggressions against Black Germans occur and reoccur, all plays in the dissertation ranging from dates 2008 to 2015 feature them. While the type of microaggression may differ, the plays show the various ways Black German identity is routinely rejected, denied, and disavowed.

Increasingly, the stories of Afro-German plays transform from general to specific experiences. In 2008, plays dealt with experiences such as encountering well-intentioned people who ask "Where do you come from?" Finally, in 2015, the last play focuses on telling one story, in particular the story of an East German man. A general story makes the experiences accessible to People of Color audiences, but a singular story, where not all audiences relate, makes the audience members challenge assumptions, while also offering space for missing Black German narratives. The stage gives Black Germans empowerment, the knowledge that these microaggressions are not acceptable, and ideas about how to handle them.

In these plays, Afro-German actors perform for themselves and on their own terms. Performing from their own viewpoints, Afro-German actors offer a wide variety of Black German narratives. The kaleidoscopic nature of Black German theater offers all audiences a change in perspective. The plays have laid the foundation for how Afro-Germans thematize race and find empowerment. This foundation can produce future work because there are more Afro-German actors and more plays are performed in larger theaters (Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Max Gorki Theater, and Englisches Theater Berlin), making the sustainability of these plays possible. In these theater houses, the plays can

impact various types of audiences. I believe that these plays can and will impact white German audiences as they have in the past through internal questioning. White audiences sit and watch situations of racism in Germany that Black Germans experience every day. More importantly, I believe that Black German theater empowers Black German actors and Black German audience members. Meanwhile, Black German actors have been acting in German theaters across the country. Most recently, Simone Devi's play *Black Women in Space* debuted at the Sophiensæle in fall 2016.

Looking forward, I hope for more Black German plays, as the stage gives artists more creative control than publishing.[430] I do envision Black German theater becoming more mainstream in more theater houses, but money, especially state money, will remain an issue if dramaturgs continue to not want to cast Black actors or let Black dramaturgs direct and produce shows. As long as there is limited space for Black German theater, it will not grow. Black German theater pushes boundaries further and further, but the reality of gatekeeping in the theater world is very real.

There is still so much to say about this genre. I hope that future Black German theater scholarship addresses issues that I was not able to here. Label Noir is currently working on a production of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, marking their first performance of a classical play. Considering Amina Eisner, the actress in *real life: Deutschland* who went on to university to study theater and co-wrote a play entitled *Jung, schwarz, und giftig*,

[430] Michael Goetting has been open about his difficulty in finding a publisher for a book he wrote in the 1980s. Goetting attributes this to the lack of publishers willing to publish works by Afro-Germans, and the number of autobiographies written by collaborators or commissioned. These are not authors and therefore the Afro-Germans lack control over publishing of their own stories. Michael Goetting, reading from *Contrapunctus* and discussion, University of Massachusetts Amherst, November 18, 2015.

provides an example of how Black German theater is growing. Her play shows a continuation of diasporic inspiration with the quote "To be Young, Gifted, and Black" from Nina Simone's song of the same name and Lorraine Hansberry's posthumously published autobiography. Eisner's play tells the story of two young Afro-German women in Berlin. In an interview, I asked Eisner why she decided to write the play, and she said because her stories and experiences of being a Black single woman in Berlin did not exist on stage.[431] Like Eisner, Afro-Germans continue to claim the stage as a space for their own unique stories.

[431] Amina Eisner, interview by Jamele Watkins, July 23, 2014.

APPENDIX A

"HEIMAT, LETZTER VERSUCH" BY LARA-SOPHIE MILAGRO

Bin ich in der fernen Fremde
wo mir nichts vertraut
wo die Stadt mit Desinteresse auf mich niederschaut
wo ich durch die Straßen gehe
und nicht weiß – wohin?
wo kein Baum mir sagen möchte
dass ich wichtig bin . . . ,

wo wenn ich ein Buch ergreife
und es lesen will
keine Zeile sich mir öffnet
Worte schweigen still
wo wenn ich den Mund auftue
um mich zu erklären
Nomen, Verben, Adjektive
sich dagegen wehren . . . ,

wo wenn ich den Raum betrete
das Gespräch verstummt
und wenn ich nach Schlaf mich sehne
leise etwas summt
und wann immer ich auch komme
es ist schon passiert
und ganz gleich wo ich mich setzte
ich bin falsch platziert . . . ,

wo mich in der Menschenmenge
kein Gesicht erkennt
und den ich zu kennen glaube
eilig weiter rennt
wo die Uhr wenn ich sie frage
immer sagt zu spät!
wo der Weg den ich begehe
meinen Schritt verschmäht . . . ,

Heimat heißt: die Sprache fühlen
Nicht nur sie verstehen
Heimat heißt: vertraute Wege
kennend zu begehen
Heimat heißt: Erinnerungen
Akten meiner selbst

Straßen, Häuser, Bäume, Menschen
Akten meiner selbst

Heimat: das ist keine Hymne
keine Hand auf's Herz
keine Eide, ew'ge Bünde
schwör ich himmelwärts
steht der eigne Volkscharakter
einem nicht sehr nah
ist er doch vertraut, vor allem
ist er einschätzbar. . . (?)

Heimat heißt: erkannt zu werden
auch wenn man nicht will
Heimat heißt: dazugehören
Lauthals oder still
Heimat: das kann überall sein
da und hier und dort
und wo immer Du auch sein wirst
ist mein Heimatort. . . ,

wird die Heimat Dir zur Fremde:
geh ich mit dir fort.

"Home, last attempt" [English]

Am I in distant foreign lands
where nothing is familiar
where the city looks down on me with disinterest
where I walk through the street
and don't know –where to go?
where no tree wants to tell me
that I'm important . . . ,

Where when I grab a book
and want to read it
no line opens itself to me
Words remain silent
where when I open my mouth
to explain myself
nouns, verbs, adjectives
reject me

Where when I enter the room
the conversation halts

and when I crave sleep
something hums quietly
and whenever I arrive somewhere
things have already happened
and exactly where I sit myself
I feel displaced

where in the crowd
no face recognizes me
and the person I think I know
runs on in a hurry
where when I look at the clock it always says
too late!
where the path I tread
scorns my every step . . . ,

Home means: to feel the language
not only to understand it
Home means: familiar paths
to knowingly walk upon
Home means: memories
evidence of my existence
Streets, houses, trees, people
evidence of me

Home: it is no anthem
no hand-over-heart
No oath, eternal allegiance
I swear to the heavens
if the character of the nation
doesn't mean anything to you
but at least its familiar and
above all it's predictable . . . (?)

Home means: to be recognized
even when you don't want to be
Home means: belonging
screaming or silent
Home: it can be anywhere
there and here
and anywhere you go
is my home . . . ,

And if home becomes foreign to you
I'll find a new home with you.

APPENDIX B

ALSO BY MAIL PERFORMANCE DETAILS

Feb 16, 2013 in Frankfurt/Main at the Circus during ISD Black History Month. Starring: Moses Adekunle, Clementine Burnley, T. Vicky Germain, Noah Hofmann, Philipp Khabo Köpsell, Asad Schwarz-Msesilamba and Mirjam Nuenning.

March 1, 2013 in Berlin-Kreuzberg at English Theater Berlin (5 Euro) for the Expat Expo. Starring: Moses Adekunle, Clementine Burnley, T. Vicky Germain, Noah Hofmann, Philipp Khabo Köpsell, Asad Schwarz-Msesilamba and Mirjam Nuenning.

March 29, 2013 in Hamburg at Westwerk (3 Euro). Starring: Moses Adekunle, Dela Gakpo, T. Vicky Germain, Noah Hofmann, Asad Schwarz-Msesilamba and Thabo Thindi.

December 5, 2013 in Luton (South London) at the Luton Hat Factory (5 Pounds). Starring: Ayesha Casely-Hayford and Adwoa-Alexsis Mintah, directed by Oluwatoyin Odunsi.

CANCELLED: June 1, 2013 in Berlin at Café Aicy and Mimi's in Neukölln

APPENDIX C

"BORDERLESS AND BRAZEN: A POEM AGAINST THE GERMAN 'U-NOT-Y" BY MAY AYIM

(translated by May Ayim, p. 48)

i will be african
even if you want me to be german
and i will be german
even if my blackness does not suit you
i will go
yet another step further
to the furthest edge
where my sisters—where my brothers stand
where
our
FREEDOM
begins
i will go
yet another step further and another step and
will return
when i want
if i want
and remain borderless and brazen
1990

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